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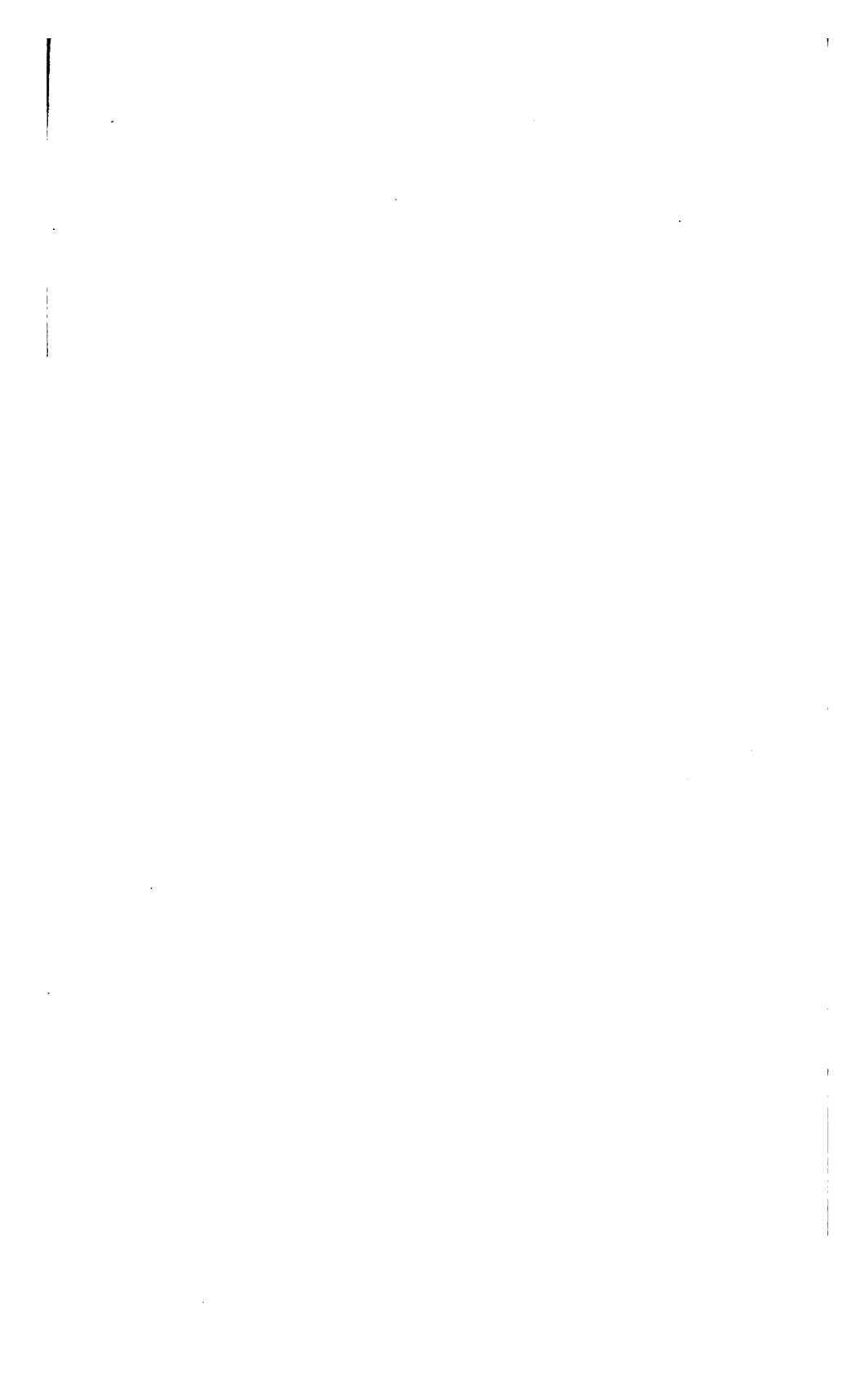
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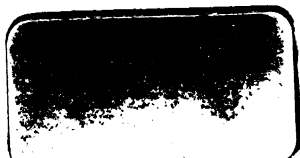








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THE LAW
OF
ANTI-RELIGIOUS LIBEL
RECONSIDERED,
IN A LETTER

TO THE
EDITOR OF THE CHRISTIAN EXAMINER,
IN ANSWER TO AN ARTICLE OF THAT PERIODICAL AGAINST A
PAMPHLET, ENTITLED

“CONSIDERATIONS, &c.” BY JOHN SEARCH.

BY
THE REV. JOSEPH BLANCO WHITE, M.A.
OF ORIEL COLLEGE, OXFORD.



Et sentire quæ velis, et quæ sentias dicere.

DUBLIN :
RICHARD MILLIKEN AND SON,
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Printed by JOHN S. FOLDS, 5, Bachelor's Walk.

LAW OF LIBEL,

&c. &c.

DEAR SIR,

IT is very satisfactory to my feelings that, finding myself (as I conceive) bound to publish some observations on the 1st article of the new series of the Christian Examiner, for March of the present year, I can address you as a person with whom I have the honour and pleasure of being acquainted. That this is not a mere complimentary introduction to the present letter, you will readily perceive by what I am about to state.

1. Whatever affords the slightest countenance to the principle that the man who feels convinced of his being in possession of revealed truth, has a right to exert whatever portion of temporal power he may happen to possess, in preventing other men from reasoning against that conviction, brings to

1. The persecuting principle, irritating to the author's mind. His practical knowledge of that principle.

my mind associations and recollections so deeply painful, that I am hardly able to check the expression of my internal suffering. On the other hand, finding myself to be one (I will not say singular) but certainly somewhat remarkable living instance of the effects of that principle, against the happiness, against the most unquestionable natural claims of men who love TRUTH, and respect their own intellectual rights ; seeing also that my strength is fast declining by age, and long and severe bodily suffering, I am irresistibly moved to enter my solemn protest against the intolerant opinions, which, to my utter regret, I hear proclaimed in that very country, and by those very persons who are most alarmed at the intolerance of the Church of Rome.

2. The author especially called to write upon this subject.

2. Whether I am right or wrong in this notion of a personal duty on my part, it is for others to judge. I fully anticipate the decision of a certain class of men, of whose temper I have before had considerable experience. To them I have not a word to say. To persons of common candour I wish to state, that one of the reasons why I feel myself individually called to the performance of this public duty is, that having at length learnt by long practice not to mind obloquy, I am probably the only man of my profession, in the whole of this kingdom, who can undertake that duty at *no* risk of loss or

suffering ;—certainly at *no risk* which can make me uneasy. The sacrifices by which I have obtained this freedom have long, long been made. Other men would have to prepare themselves for similar ones if they were about to speak as freely as I intend.

3. And now I am confident you will easily be convinced why, in such circumstances, I heartily congratulate myself in being able to address a person I esteem and respect. My only apprehension when I made up my mind to answer your Reviewer of *John Search's Considerations on the Law of Libel in regard to Religion*, was that my painful recollections might make me write more as giving vent to indignation, or perhaps disguising it into scornful satire, than it becomes a Christian. This apprehension, however, entirely subsided when I resolved to address you ; for as I know that you will receive what I am about to say with the frankness and candour which I have found to be in your character, the idea of such a reception will act as a mild and friendly constant check to over-excitement on my part.

3. The author's determination to check his feelings.

4. Perhaps since you began to read this letter, you have been under the impression that this eager stepping-forward in defence of *John Search*, has disclosed to you the real person whom that name

4. The author knows not the writer who calls himself *John Search*.

disguises. If your suspicion falls upon me, you certainly do me too much honour. I remember the familiar but expressive words which I uttered when I first read the work in question. "I would (I said) endure a dozen lashes at the halberds to have been the author of this argument." You will observe that I confined myself to the *argument*; for probably I would have expressed myself differently upon some incidental points. If, on the other hand, you should construe my zeal into an expression of personal friendship for the author, then I must tell you that both the person and name of the writer of the pamphlet are totally unknown to me. All that I know of this matter is, that the author is *none of my acquaintance*.—Having, as I hope, cleared myself of all suspicion of partiality as to the author, I must add that as I am in a similar state of ignorance in regard to the writer of the article, I may be considered as equally free from any personal prejudice against him.

5. Statement of the law of religious libel.

5. One more preliminary I must beg you to allow me; and that is a brief statement of the point in question; for I conceive that every book and pamphlet should be so complete in itself, that the reader may be able to understand, by means of it alone, the subject of the discussion. In the present case, this precaution is the more necessary, because I have

found well-educated persons in this kingdom, who are not aware of the existence of any law limiting the right of publishing opinions on religious subjects. I shall therefore insert the clear statement which the author, who calls himself "John Search," has given in his first two paragraphs, of the state of the law of libel on religious subjects, as it exists in his Majesty's dominions.

" By the existing law of the land, so far as relates
" to the publication of religious opinions, any writ-
" ing whatever, which shall tend to impeach the
" evidences of the Christian faith, or in any manner
" to impugn Christianity as a whole, is, I believe,
" indictable as a blasphemous libel, and punishable
" as such by fine and imprisonment, ' or other infa-
" mous corporal punishment.' Be the work, in all
" other qualities, what it may—be its tone and lan-
" guage temperate or insolent, serious or flippant—
" or its object pursued by sober argumentation, or
" gratuitous invective and contumely ;—all this
" makes no other difference, I apprehend, in the eye
" of the law, than simply in the way of *aggravation*.
" The advised attempt to dispute the truth of Scrip-
" ture is itself the legal crime: statute law and
" common law unite in declaring it such: and the
" writer is liable in every such case to the penalties
" forementioned.

“ It matters not that publications of this kind
“ have occasionally escaped prosecution,—whether
“ from voluntary forbearance on the part of those
“ in office, or through any silent check of public
“ opinion : this argues nothing as to the state of the
“ *law*, which does exist to the extent described, and
“ may at any time be so enforced. Neither again
“ does it much alter the case, that expressions are
“ said to have been used by judges, in some of the
“ later trials of this kind, proclaiming toleration to
“ all fair discussion, on whatever subject. For these
“ expressions, if not sufficiently neutralized by other
“ opposite expressions of the same judges on the
“ same occasions, and by their manner of appealing
“ to the older precedents of common law, seem at
“ least to be effectually so by those older precedents
“ themselves, as also by the language of the *Statute*,
“ (9 and 10 W. III. c. 32) founded, as lawyers tell
“ us, *upon* the common law, and simply declaratory
“ of its import. In spite therefore of any such
“ questionable expressions from the Bench, or of
“ such limited *sufferance* as may in some cases have
“ been conceded, it is still, I apprehend, decidedly
“ illegal to express any opinion fundamentally ad-
“ verse to the national faith. In the department
“ indeed of *private* opinion or inquiry (as we are
“ sometimes told, with somewhat more emphasis

“ than the indulgence might seem to call for,) the
“ freedom allowed to the British subject is absolutely
“ unlimited. Nay, he might go the further length
“ of *publishing* his inquiries, should they even
“ involve the closest scrutiny of the Christian evi-
“ dences,—provided always their results be not un-
“ favourable. But, should they unhappily take that
“ turn, and tend to the impeachment of the received
“ faith,—at that precise point, if I at all understand
“ the law, their publication becomes illegal: nor is
“ there, so far as I can discover, any possible mode
“ of expression, any possible sobriety of tone, or in-
“ tegrity of purpose, which could *legally* shield the
“ inquirer disclosing those results, from the liabi-
“ lities of blasphemy. And though it remain at last
“ for a *jury* to declare on oath, libel or no libel, (a
“ source of protection which we are sometimes told
“ no other country can boast of ;*) yet what does
“ this amount to at last? for since libel is essentially
“ that and that only which the *law* declares to be
“ such, and it *does* declare this of *all* writings which
“ impugn the truth of Scripture; the jury, as sworn
“ to give a *true* verdict, are bound in such case, not
“ less by their oath, than by the customary influ-
“ ence of the judge, to surrender the accused party

* Quart. Rev. No. 70. p. 571.

“ into his hands, and thereby to his free discretion
 “ as to the fine, imprisonment, and other penalties.”

6. The author's grief to see persecution still the law of England.

6. You will, I trust, excuse me, Mr. Editor, when I confess to you that, though the principal facts stated in the above passage have been known to me for many years, the reading of it produces a feeling of despondency, from which I cannot recover till I have drawn my mind away from this melancholy picture to the contemplation of the final triumph of the true Spirit of Christ, which I confidently expect in the midst of such discouraging exhibitions. I am aware that it is not in your power, or in that of the writer of the article in question, to enter into my feelings : and, indeed, I make great allowance for the inexperience in which the present and some past generations of clergymen have lived, in these kingdoms, in regard to the principle of persecution. That deadly poison has been carefully stopped up in England in well-coloured phials, and is administered only by drops, in the shape of medicine. I have seen it confidently and even carelessly kept for the destruction of heretics, with no more compunction or management than that with which men use arsenic to kill vermin. Yet I am convinced, that whether in grains, or by pounds, the poison is the same, and the *principle* on which it is used, equally unjustifiable. Consider, then, a man in the twenty-fifth year

of his voluntary expatriation, and within a few months of the sixtieth of his life, who, when he looks about him, finds that the SAME PRINCIPLE of religious persecution from which he fled in the vigour of manhood, not only lives in the laws of his second country, but is actively cherished and promoted by men, who, like your Reviewer, show unquestionable marks of their being sincere Christians:—Consider, I beg you, the circumstances of the person who now addresses you, and judge of his disappointment!

7. I do not know whether your Reviewer will exert his ingenuity, as he has done in regard to the author of "*John Search's Considerations*," in finding reasons for excluding me from the number of true believers in Christianity. Yet I feel bound to declare, that my objection to limitation of the freedom of *discussion* and *decision*, on religious subjects, extends beyond the limits which the Reviewer supposes to have been set by that able writer. It is, indeed, my fixed principle, that on subjects where the final object is TRUTH, every man has an unlimited right to oppose, *in argument*, whatever any other man has a right to prove by argument. Within the terms in which I have expressed myself,—i. e. *when the question is Truth*,—I make no exception whatever. And I maintain that any law, which limits the rights of argumentation and conclusion,

7. He admits no limitation to the liberty of argument and conclusion.

proceeds from the same persecuting principle, which, in Spain and Turkey, drags to the scaffold any person who declares the established religion of those countries, respectively, to be not of divine origin.

8. True question concerning the liberty of publishing opinions, stated. Degree of punishment *unimportant* in this question.

8. It would be happy, indeed, for the cause of Christianity, if those who wish to see it supported against argument by the fear of such punishment as the law of England threatens in its defence, would sit down to examine how perfectly delusive is the difference which is attempted to be made between the *number* of doctrines which are allowed to be questioned, and the quality and degree of the punishment, with which the offenders are visited. The true question is this : has any man, or set of men, a right to prescribe to others what *propositions* they must never attack as erroneous?—The defender of the existing laws on religious libel is bound to shew, both who those privileged beings are, and to demonstrate their titles in the most satisfactory manner. Until he has done this, the equal rights of discussion and explicit judgment must be considered *inalienable* in every one to whom God has given the power of thinking, and of expressing his thoughts. To infringe these rights, even by the slightest penalty, must be criminal. If, on the contrary, the *supremacy of thought and judgment* could be unquestionably found to exist anywhere, it would be right

to punish resistance to that power with any degree of severity which might be necessary for the suppression of the offence. In such a case, I should say, that *severity* would be mercy ; and that it would be infinitely more humane to threaten, and punish with death, the rebels against that *intellect*, or *collection of intellects*, who should be found to possess the right to judge for others, than to allure men to the free use of their own reason to a certain degree, as it were to entrap them in the act of transgressing the barriers towards which they are seen to run full tilt, but beyond which, “ *fine, imprisonment, and infamous bodily punishment,*” await them.*

9. The source of every mistake with which I am acquainted, on this subject, is a *false analogy* between the right (on the one hand) of every supreme civil government to judge for others on certain

9. A false analogy the source of every mistake in this question.

* It would be unworthy of myself, and unjust every way towards the kind friend who affords me a *home* under his roof, to omit quoting his works, for fear of being charged with the intention of flattering. Whoever knows any thing of Archbishop Whately, and, I may add, of myself, and yet entertains that suspicion, would be *justly* exposed to it if he lived with any Lord, or Bishop, or Archbishop. I must take this opportunity of stating, that the MS. of this letter goes to the printer, without my Most Reverend friend having read or heard a word of it. I wish, by this means, to save my dear friend from all responsibility as to its contents. The work of Archbishop Whately, to which I refer my readers, is his *Essay on Persecution*.

matters *directly* connected with the peace and welfare of the community, and (on the other) the natural right of parents to educate their own children according to the best of their judgment. The examination of this fallacy is not easy, owing to the manifold and deep-rooted prejudices with which it is involved ; but as it is of the utmost importance in the present question, I must beg you, Mr. Editor, to excuse the length and probable imperfections of my analysis. At all events, I hope I shall be able to throw out some hints, which candid minds may improve and complete for themselves.

10. Parental government, and the metaphor taken from it, not fit to express civil subjection.

10. It might be excusable in a laudatory address to the king of an *unlimited* monarchy, to represent his office in the light of parental authority. This figure would be of more or less merit, according as the writer used it either with the design of suggesting to the prince in what *spirit* he should exercise his authority, or from the notion that men had put themselves under a supreme ruler with the intention of continuing, in regard to the monarchy, for ever and in every thing, in a position analogous to that of children to their father. Now the metaphor involved in the expression, *a parental government*, cannot be used to express the *extent* of the authority committed to the supreme power of the state. In the relation of a father to his own child,

nature has set no limits to the power of the former, except the slowly growing fitness for resistance in the latter. *Subjection* is evidently intended to be temporary ; and, if civil laws had not recognised a period for manumission, nature would loudly proclaim it in the opposite progressions of physical strength in both parent and son. The metaphor in question is therefore most inappropriate to represent the civil subjection of a people to their supreme government. Take it from an unnatural and brutal parent, and it will certainly be applicable to the worst oriental despotisms, where the *political* parent keeps his children in a state of perpetual infancy, in order that he may beat them, and starve them, and kill them whenever it suits his pleasure. It is infinitely more like a person who breeds cattle for his use, than of a rational man who begets children whom he wishes to make good and happy.

11. It does not require any profound philosophy to perceive, that men cannot be placed *artificially* in any subjection analogous to that of *children* to their parents, without exposing them to the most fatal consequences. When men shall have the power to implant in the breast of rulers, feelings towards their subjects similar to those of parents to their offspring, then, and not before, will they be justifiable in establishing *parental* governments,

11. Men placed *artificially* in the analogous state of *children*, must be ruined.

in trying to reduce the existing ones to that condition, or in defending certain applications of civil authority, under that figure of speech. Nature, however, has most strictly reserved to herself that privilege, and she protests in the clearest accents whenever mankind attempt their clumsy and blundering imitations of the true *parental authority*, the abuse of which she has obviated by means of a set of most delicate and mysterious laws.

12. Objection. Do not governments necessarily act with somewhat of the discretionary power of parents?

12. I know the usual answer to this view, and gladly take the earliest opportunity of meeting it. "Governments (it is said) are, without question, entitled to judge for others in a great variety of matters. Why, then, should they not extend this right to every thing that concerns the welfare of the community which Providence has placed under their care? And what can be of greater importance to society than religion? Do not all the social duties flow naturally and without compulsion from the religious principle? Or can it be indifferent in the government of a nation, whether a true religious principle is cherished and supported by the supreme power, or whether the law permits attacks, which the press multiplies interminably, against the headspring of all morality, law, and order? If it be objected that governments may err in the choice of a religion, it should be remembered that so they

may, and frequently do in all other points. No sensible man denies that parents frequently educate their children in their own erroneous views of religion ; and yet who would be so inhuman as to take those children away by violence ? We leave parents to the judgment of God in the discharge of their parental duties ; why should we not refer governments to the same tribunal ? Why should we struggle against the salutary restraints which our wise and liberal laws still lay upon men who would, but for those restraints, inundate the country with infidel pamphlets, persuading others to believe that their hopes should be limited to this world, and that it is the interest of all to ‘eat and to drink for to-morrow they die.’ ”

13. I have done, Mr. Editor, every thing in my power to give the reasons of the opponent every advantage of which his view is capable. I have condensed that view as much as possible, and artfully varied it at every turn, that it may escape the steady aim of critical judgment. I have copied the confusion of thought which I find in the supporters of laws in defence of religion, and I shall now unravel the sophism which so frequently misleads good men, and has bewildered your Reviewer.

13. Analysis of the preceding objection.

14. When it is said that laws or governments (these two things are artfully made synonymous in

14. Proper objects of civil government.

this question, as I shall endeavour to show) should have the right of judging for the people in every thing which concerns the welfare of the community, the word *welfare* is used with a comprehensiveness of signification which gives entrance to a most dangerous error. The proposition, however, would be true if it were limited, by adding, "within the range of the objects which human governments may be reasonably expected to obtain much better for the whole community, than individuals can for themselves."

15. Civil government not a good in itself.

15. Most people, in speaking of *civil government* in the abstract, forget that to be governed by other men, is *in itself no positive good for man*. The worst of human governments is certainly preferable to *anarchy*; but, though in comparison with every gradation of that greatest of social evils, *government*, in the abstract, must appear a great blessing; it is undeniable that, in every possible shape, it is a *blessing by contrast*. It is indeed a blessing, but only in the light of *a choice of evils*, in which, by embracing a slight inconvenience, we purchase exemption from a great calamity.

16. Practical importance of this view.

16. Nor is this a useless speculation. Had the Ancients sufficiently considered this point, they would not have preposterously aimed at improving mankind by extending more and more the attri-

butions of the civil government. They would not have dreamt with Plato of a perfect government, which was to regulate every action, public and private, of the citizen, and be so literally *parental* as to prevent *individuals* from recognizing their own children. But it is evident that they were misled by the notion (a notion, indeed, which in the infancy of society, when governments acted as *civilizing powers*, contained a great portion of truth,) that the proper end of civil government was to *lead* in every thing. That very acute and learned, though strangely inconsistent writer, Bishop Warburton, has stated this common error with such truth and spirit, that I conceive I shall do well to insert one of two very striking passages on this point, out of his works. Having observed* how perfectly out of the power of governments it is to employ the sanction of rewards, and having quoted some words from *Gulliver's Travels*, remarking that "all political romancers, from Plato to this author, make civil rewards and punishments the *two hinges of government*;" "I have often wondered (he continues) what it was that could lead them from fact and universal practice in so

* *Divine Leg.*—B. 1, sect. 2. The other passage is, *Alliance between Church and State*—B. 1, c. iv. beginning "But begin with *Civil Society*."

fundamental a point. But without doubt it was this : the design of such sort of writings is to give a perfect pattern of civil government ; and to supply the fancied defects in real societies. The end of government coming first under consideration ; and the general practice of society seeming to declare this end to be only, what in truth it is, *security to our temporal liberty and property* ; the simplicity of it displeased, and the plan appeared defective. They imagined that by enlarging the bottom, they should ennoble the structure ; and therefore formed a romantic project of making civil society serve for all the good purposes it was even accidentally capable of producing. And thus, instead of giving us a true picture of civil government, they jumbled together all sorts of societies into one, and confounded the *religious*, the *literary*, the *mercantile*, the *convivial*, with the civil. Whoever reads them carefully, if indeed they be worth reading carefully, will find that the errors they abound in are all of this nature ; and that they arise from the losing, or never having had, a true idea of the simple plan of civil government : a circumstance which, as we have shewn elsewhere,* hath occasioned many wrong judgments

* Alliance between Church and State.

concerning it. No wonder, then, that this mistake, concerning the *end* of civil society, drew after it others concerning the *means*."

17. Such is, in fact, the origin of the still prevalent and fatal mistake as to a supposed right of civil governments to judge for the *governed* upon points connected with religion. Religion, it is said, is the best foundation of morality : morality is the only sound security for the observance of civil laws ; if, therefore, government is established to enforce the observance of the laws of the state, it must employ the best *means* to accomplish that end, which is the prevalence of religion. Such, indeed, is the fascination of this sophism, that Warburton himself, who had so clearly detected its fallacy, still involved himself in it when he found it useful to maintain the strange theory on which he founded his supposed demonstration of the Divine Mission of Moses. It was necessary for that fanciful demonstration, to lay it down as an axiom, that no civil society can exist unless the members of it believe "*the being of a God—his providence over human affairs—and the natural essential difference of moral good and evil.*" Standing upon this *notion*, as if he had set his feet upon a rock, he declares that "it is directly the office of the magistrate to cherish, protect, and

17. Bishop Warburton's inconsistency.

propagate these doctrines; and all oppugners of them, it is as much his right and duty to restrain, as any the most flagrant offenders against civil peace." In order to escape the charge of contradiction with his own previous principle, Warburton explains that "the magistrate concerns himself with the maintenance of these three fundamental articles, not as they promote our *future* happiness but our present: as they are the very foundation and bond of civil policy."*

18. Fanciful and changeable nature of the view which allows the magistrate to meddle with opinions.

18. Now I would ask upon what ground does Bishop Warburton, or any one else who grants such power to the civil government, take upon himself to define how many and which are the *opinions* which should be considered so necessarily connected with the commission of crimes against society as to be punishable equally with the most flagrant offences against civil peace? I should conceive that the moment we grant that the supreme magistrate has a right to meddle with our *opinions*, because they may disturb his government, we must acknowledge in him an equal right to decide *which* are the opinions which have that effect. And surely, if any one might be considered entitled to credit upon such a subject, it would be the supreme magistrate himself, in whom we may

* Alliance between Church and State—ubi sup.

suppose some knowledge as to the practical effects of opinions, in the character of assisting or disturbing forces in the complicated machine which it is his business to regulate. But it seems, indeed, preposterous that a speculative divine should gravely dictate from his study, which *opinions* the supreme authority of the state is to allow as innocent in their consequences, and which he is to rank with the most atrocious crimes, as directly subversive of society.

19. Your Reviewer, Mr. Editor, appears to be more consistent in his plan for punishing opinions. According to his view, he who grants that the supreme magistrate has a right to check certain opinions, defeats the argument against the existing limitation of the liberty of speech. He accuses "John Search" of *shyness*; "he (says the Reviewer) does not speak out and say boldly that he would allow a man to deny the existence, the goodness, the wisdom, the mercy, the overruling providence of God, or the obligation of human duties and future responsibility of man." And on the supposition (which I do not believe) that "John Search" wishes to exclude these subjects from the liberty which he desires for others, the Reviewer proceeds to shew that such an exception would be equivalent to an abandonment of the

19. If the supreme magistrate has a right to meddle with *any* opinions, that right must extend to *all* opinions.

principle on which the existing law is attacked in the pamphlet. "But if he would not tolerate (he says) an unlimited discussion as to natural religion . . . does he not give up the very principle for the support of which his whole pamphlet is written? Does he not admit that there is a certain point beyond which, in any well ordered society, toleration of discussion cannot be allowed?" Although I do not agree with the Reviewer as to the fact that *John Search* expresses himself favourably to any limitation of the freedom of discussion,* I perfectly concur in the inference, that if the writer in question did so, he would ruin his own argument.

* It appears clear to me that what John Search says *incidentally* respecting the principles of natural religion, is directly connected with the word *harsh*, which he had applied to the existing law. "That the religious inquirer (he says) who—without a thought or feeling of irreverence to God or religion, as such, or a single word of intentional insult to the institutions of his country—seeks only by fair investigation to try 'the certainty of the things wherein he has been instructed,' should hereby be subjected to penalties thus severe—does seem harsh, be his conclusions never so faulty: (and even of *that*, who is to be the *arbiter*?)—it does seem harsh to make him liable to penalties thus severe and thus infamous, for submitting to public judgment the grounds of his own distrust of certain human statements and human testimony, on subjects confessedly of the nearest import to himself and all mankind: for alleging, in the way of argument, that he has just grounds for doubt—not of the existence, not of the goodness, the wisdom, the mercy, or the overruling providence of God, nor the obligation

20. There are two suppositions on which the right of the supreme magistrate to prevent the publication of opinions by punishment can be admitted.

1st. That every supreme magistrate, by virtue of his office, possesses a knowledge superior to that of his subjects on religious matters.—2d. That as it is his office to keep society in peace and order, he must be allowed to prevent the existence and propagation of opinions, which, according to his judgment, cannot but interfere with, and oppose the execution of, his important duties. I cannot conceive any other ground for the right contended for in favour of the supreme magistrate. I will not, however, trifle upon such a serious subject, by stopping to show the absurdity of the first supposition. Not only has God removed even the slightest appearance of marks

20. Two suppositions on which alone the supreme magistrate can have a right to punish opinions.

of human duties, and future responsibility of man". A candid reader will easily perceive that the author does not *grant* that it would be *just* to punish for such doubts, but that it would be less *revolting*. And the reason is clear, since the shock which such doubts would produce, the *fear of practical evil consequences*, which is generally at the bottom of religious intolerance, would make the error of punishing more excusable. John Search himself shews that this must have been his meaning, by the words which immediately follow. "To state the nature of this offence (the offence punishable by the present law) quite plainly, and not to outstep the *sympathies* of his hearer, is not always within the skill of the lawyer"—p. 4 and 5. I have put *sympathies* in italics, as being the word which explains the true meaning of the passage.

which might be pleaded by some men, as natural titles to be lords over other men's consciences (and the *declaration* of opinions is intimately connected with conscience) ; but the slightest glance over the world, as we know it from present experience and the history of the past, must convince us that a superior knowledge of religious truth is so far from being a privilege of supreme governments, that the grossest errors are supported *by law*, almost without exception, over the face of the earth. The defenders of the legal coercion of opinions are therefore necessarily confined to the ground of *policy*. The magistrate, according to them, must possess the right of checking opinions, upon the *probability* that, if allowed, they would disturb his government. And who is the best judge of this probability ?—Unquestionably the supreme authority itself, wherever that authority may reside. In this kingdom, where parliament possesses the supreme legislative power, parliament itself must decide what religious opinions will promote the observance of the laws, or be an obstacle to it. To grant that the right of opposing and checking opinions on religious subjects arises from the impediments which those opinions may throw in the way of civil order,—and to admit any other authority that shall say to parliament, you may interfere with such religious opinions, and not with others is impossible, without contradiction.

21. Now I beg your Reviewer to consider the following case. That it will never take place in the present state of things, is no objection to it as an illustration of the principle which your friend defends.—It is a matter of fact (I put aside the theological accuracy of the assertion,) that many learned divines have asserted the existence of a strong demoralizing tendency in the high Calvinistic system of predestination. The articles of our church themselves declare the existence of that tendency under certain circumstances. Considering that, according to the theory which I am combating, the legislature has a right to check the publication of religious opinions, not as they may be *true* or *false*, for of *that* parliament is not a judge, but as they may interfere, or be supposed to interfere, with the welfare of the kingdom, there is nothing absurd in the supposition that an act might be passed, subjecting preachers and promoters of Calvinism “to fine and imprisonment, or other infamous corporal punishment.”* Well,

21. Consequences of the only tenable ground.

* On the supposition that the legislature have a right to check and punish opinions which seem to have a tendency to produce crime, it is difficult to conceive a better ground for legislative enactment than that afforded by the XVIIth Article of the English Church :

“ As the godly consideration of predestination, and our election in Christ, is full of sweet pleasure, and unspeakable comfort

then, will your Reviewer acknowledge that such a law would be within the proper limits of parliamentary authority? Would not the clamour of a certain portion, at least, of the religious world reach the skies, at the atrociousness of such a law? Yet I cannot conceive with what shadow of reason either your Reviewer, or any defender of the *civil* right, to check opinions by punishment, could complain. If the legislature has a right to check *opinions*, it is not because the legislature pretends to any thing like infallibility, or even a knowledge on these matters superior to that of divines. That right is acknowledged by the defenders of the *present law* as necessary for the preservation of *civil* order. And who, I ask, is authorised to deny to the legislature the right of deciding what opinions may be injurious to the community? Is it not the natural right of the engineer who makes the wheels, and graduates the springs of a machine, to judge what things may impede the motions for which he has calculated the mechanism?

to godly persons, &c. &c.: so, for curious and carnal persons, lacking the Spirit of Christ, to have continually before their eyes the sentence of God's predestination, is a most dangerous downfall, whereby the devil doth thrust them either into desperation, or into wretchedness (the same as recklessness) of most unclean living, no less perilous than desperation."

22. I would humbly and sincerely request all defenders of the existing law, on this matter, to examine their heart, and see whether it is really for any authority but *their own* that they claim the privileges which they seem to wish to bestow on the legislature or the supreme magistrate? I would entreat them to assist me in tracing their *opinion on this point* to its true source. Let us try. In the first place, why is it that their language on this subject is so unsettled, as at one time to attribute the power of checking opinions to *the law* (a mere abstraction of the mind); at other times to the supreme magistrate, and then again to the legislature? The reason is, that, at the bottom of their hearts, they feel a most decided reluctance to lodge that authority with any of these real or imaginary beings. We hear very plausible speeches in commendation of the *parental* rights and duties of the supreme magistrate. "Why should he (it is said) not watch over his people as a father over his household, seeing that the demoralizing poison of false opinions may dissolve the body of the nation?"—And yet not a king is allowed to ascend the throne without *renouncing for ever his own judgment* on religious matters, and binding himself with the most solemn oaths to hold the tenets of a certain portion of his subjects.—Can there be a clearer proof, that *under the name of the*

22. Contradictory conduct of the defenders of the civil authority's right to check opinions.

Sovereign, of his parental care, and his conscientious judgment, the defenders of intolerance mean themselves ? Let us proceed. "The law (it is said) should protect Christianity, because *Christianity is part and parcel of the law.*"—But is the law any thing but the express will of the legislature ? Suppose the legislature should change its collective opinion, would you tolerate a new law, declaring that as religion is essentially *personal*, and as a *nation*, collectively, has neither a *conscience*, nor a *soul to be saved*, so it cannot have a religion :—that the majority of individuals in this kingdom profess Christianity, *de facto*, but that the *kingdom* (an imaginary being, a creation of the mind,) is neither Christian, nor Mahometan, nor Unbeliever. Suppose that this conceivable act declared, that though, at present, it was not intended to appropriate the wealth which had hitherto been employed in supporting Christianity, to the teachers of any other religion, parliament wished solemnly to declare their right to bestow that wealth on whomsoever they pleased, and to promote whatever religion might seem to them best adapted to support the political system. "Stop, (I hear the opponents say) Thanks to heaven, the members of both houses of parliament, and especially the king, are still under the obligation of oaths which would make such a

law an act of perjury?"—So, then, that supreme authority of the nation has also been deprived of freedom of judgment upon these matters? The will of a parliament long, long numbered with the dead, because it happens to be the will of a certain number and succession of individuals, is the *law*, and must be the law for ever!—What then becomes of all the rights of governors, all their parental wisdom, all their inalienable authority to judge which opinions help, and which impede the operation of the laws they have to enact? Are not all these things deceitful shapes under which the *will, and the judgment, and the opinions* of a certain number of individuals disguise themselves? Is not *Self*, the *self* of every one to whom the present law affords a superiority over others—is not that *SELF* the real and only source of all the theories which bestow on civil governments the right of persecuting for opinions?

23. Long and painfully, Mr. Editor, was I troubled and almost oppressed by the horrors which cover every page of ecclesiastical history, and which are directly traceable to the determination of protecting TRUTH by law; a determination so *peculiar* to Christianity, that it cannot but disturb and agitate its sincere friends, and afford a subject of spiteful triumph to its enemies. I have said, and I do

23. Christianity the readiest disguise for the proud and angry passions.

not hesitate to repeat, that the desire and determination of protecting TRUTH by law, and consequently by penalties, is peculiar to those who profess Christianity. The historical proof of this assertion is not difficult; and the existence of this peculiarity is easily explained. No other religion has ever concerned itself about TRUTH. As far as the religion of Mahomet contends for TRUTH, it does it in imitation of Christianity, of which that religion is a gross corruption. All other religions concern themselves about acts to be performed, which, like traditional prescriptions, recommend themselves for use upon the ground of their long experienced utility. Not one of those religions (certainly not any of the most renowned and powerful, Egyptian, Greek, and Roman,) ever contended that belief in some *truth* was the sure means of securing happiness in another world. As far as the existence of another life was believed, or rather suspected, happiness in it was made to depend on some practices, the real connection of which with the object for which they were performed, no one ever dreamt of proving. The antiquity of the practice was all that was alleged in its favour. *Antiquitas proxime accedit ad Deos*, says Cicero;* and all the Roman divines of his time, and before, agreed with

* De Leg. II. 11.

him. Not so Christianity. In *it*, conviction of its *truth* is indispensable. Now, as every *good* seems to have a corresponding *evil* in attendance, and ready to spring up with it, and pervert it, so it happened with the religion of *him* who lived and died to bear witness of the truth. The peculiar *evil*, the *tares* of Christianity, is the facility which it presents to all who are not thoroughly animated by the *Spirit of Christ*, to identify themselves with the revealed truth. What I am about to say will appear to many a paradox, and to others a truism ; but, if I am to be guided by my own experience, I am bound to declare it a most important practical view in religion, and especially in connection with our present subject.

24. Your Reviewer seems rather confident of his logic, and though I shall take that point into consideration, I may here request your and his indulgence, if I remind both of you of a very useful distinction which is rather neglected by logicians among us. The distinction to which I allude is that of *objective* and *subjective* truth. That the world, both visible and invisible, is what it is, independent of our conceptions, requires no proof. This is a collective instance of *objective* truth. In things which affect our senses, this kind of truth is searched and frequently ascertained by *experiment*.

24. What is it that we call religious truth ?

But in things to which the senses cannot reach, the only truth which exists for man is *subjective*. Concerning those subjects, that is *truth* for us which each of us is persuaded to be true. Subjective truth is *our own conviction*. To use a familiar example : the moon is either inhabited or uninhabited. One of these two propositions represents an *objective truth*. But as long as men cannot take an ethereal journey to our satellite, the strongest conviction on either side of the question must be only *subjective truth* ; i. e. truth for the person who has the conviction. As we cannot approach the *objective* truth of such convictions beyond or out of our intellect, all our moral duties to truth (where moral duties are concerned, as is the case with *religious truths*,) are due to the only truth we can reach, i. e. the conviction of our own minds. But it is here that the fatal mistake takes place. The pride of the religious enthusiast takes up his *subjective truth* as the divine *objective* truth itself. On other subjects, if contradiction made him angry and impatient, he would be more or less ashamed of showing it. Not so in the present case. He indulges his most violent passions, under the character of zeal for God and his truth ; his natural desire of ruling over others, appears in the shape of a vehement concern in the preservation of the assent of the mass of the

people to the *orthodox*, i. e. his own opinions.— Because he *is sure he is right*, he positively denies that those who contradict him *can be sure they are right*. Hence that common charge of *dishonesty*, in which your Reviewer so freely indulges against all unbelievers. But of this more particularly by and by.

24. Do I mean to assert that all convictions upon religious subjects are equally right? Such a supposition would be uncandid. What I assert is, that whatever moral duties man owes to TRUTH, he owes to that subjective truth which after proper examination he has found. *Veracity* demands his avowal of it. His denial of it is a *criminal falsehood*. No *conviction of another man* can discharge him from this individual duty. As to whether any one has done every thing in his power to come to the right conclusion, such a judgment is reserved for Him who alone can read the heart. Our Creator has placed in every breast a power which, as it exists in all men, without any mark of respective superiority or inferiority, cannot be amenable to any other tribunal but that of the giver of it. Conscience is supreme in every man in *regard to himself*. To question, however, a similar supremacy in the conscience of another man—to oppose

24. What is our duty in regard to subjective religious truth?

and disturb it when it does not invade the rights of another conscience, is an outrage upon the most sacred privilege of our nature.

25 Answer
to those
who de-
mand si-
lence.

25. An evasion is frequently resorted to at this point of the argument, which I can scarcely divest in my mind from the character of an insult. It is said that what the law of England demands is only *silence*. The law allows perfect freedom to *opinions*, provided they are not expressed. A noble gift! The law of England allows that which no human power can prevent! But does not the supporter of that law perceive that unless the *silence* is imposed on both sides, it breaks, in the most flagrant manner, an equality of natural rights which must be acknowledged as unquestionably existing, till the presence, and personal identity, of a supreme judge of truth among men, is proved beyond doubt? For let it be observed that the whole question turns upon this. Unless there is a supreme judge of *truth* among men, the act of depriving any man of the natural means (argument) of defending his own *truth*, is the worst and most intolerable kind of tyranny. Nay, it is a sentence which condemns him, and as far as *penalties* can enforce such a sentence, reduces him to the condition of a dissembler—a liar. It is now many years since, on reading the

account of a trial for anti-religious libel, I became acquainted for the first time with the legal maxim, that "Christianity is part and parcel of the law of the land." I remember with what grief I entered my thoughts in the *Common-place Book* which I have generally kept near me. It is not worth the while to search for the passage which I then wrote. My impression upon the matter remains unaltered. What is meant by Christianity in that sentence? Does it mean all the doctrines which by all manner of Christians have been declared to be Christianity? No. Does it mean the doctrines of the Church of England? No; that interpretation is no longer tenable. Does it mean the virtues which Christianity recommends, and which spring from its true spirit, as the good fruit from the good tree? No; for the law of England does not recognise even adultery as a *crime*, and only gives *damages* to the complaining party. What, then, in the name of justice, does it mean? It means that no man in this kingdom shall be allowed to declare that in his opinion Christianity is not a divine revelation.— Now let me ask another question. Has the law of England the power to make every individual within its reach believe that Christianity is a *divine revelation*? No. Then were Judge Hale's assertion true, not CHRISTIANITY, but hypocrisy, falsehood,

and unmanly dissimulation, would be *part and parcel of the law of the land*.*

26. Christianity degraded.

26. It is broadly asserted by your Reviewer that the author of *John Search* must be an infidel : and this is mainly inferred from certain expressions which the contemplation of the existing law draws from him. For my part, I feel that if any man is justified in being indignant on this subject, it is the *sincere Christian*. Nothing but an inveterate habit of intolerance can prevent this effect in any real believer in Christ. Else how could he see the Gospel degraded at once, by being placed on the same level with the multitude of *false religions* which are supported by law all over the world ? It was my original intention when I read the article which has made me take up the pen, to write a series of letters, as coming from an English Missionary in the Turkish dominions. I thought of putting every argument of your Reviewer in the mouth of a *Cadi*, who should charge the missionary with the impropriety of his conduct ; who should remonstrate with him, by comparing the existing law of England with the law of Turkey on religious matters ; who should observe

* Of the law of the land I would not speak in these terms. But I have learnt from the best authorities to believe that the *dicta* of the Judges are not identical with the law.

that the *Koran* is not *part and parcel*, but the *whole law* of the Mahometan dominions all over the world. The conclusion is obvious. The question of *truth* would thus be ultimately reduced to *violence* and *superior force*. And, alas! if every nation can make its own religion *part and parcel of the law of the land*, and the most enlightened government of Protestants in Europe follows and confirms that system, what right have we to send missionaries to tempt people to rebellion against a law, the abstract principle of which we acknowledge among ourselves? Is it because we hold the TRUTH? Then let us not betray a fear that we distrust the powers of that TRUTH, even among ourselves, where it has every external advantage of honour, education, wealth, conferred on its professors, but must employ *fine, and imprisonment, and infamous bodily punishment*, to stop the mouths of its opponents. Carried away by the argument, I have not stated the reason why I gave up the plan I originally proposed. I felt confident that I might, by means of it, have made my pamphlet more spirited: but I had a higher, a more sacred object in view, and I did not hesitate a moment to choose that method which is most calculated to shew that I do not write for display, and that I do not wish (even if I

had the power) to make my opponents smart, but that my only wish is to "speak the truth in love" and charity.

27. The
Reviewer's
answers ex-
amined.

27. I have hitherto dwelt upon the general principles of the question; and my nearly exhausted strength admonishes me that it is time to begin the examination of your Reviewer's answers to *John Search*. This examination will not, however, be an easy task; for your Reviewer appears, in his manner of reasoning, to be one of those ardent persons who so mix up their feelings with their thoughts as utterly to confuse themselves, even when they are endeavouring to be logical and accurate. The whole article is a proof of this temper. A question of *legislative philosophy* comes before him: instead of putting aside all excitement as such a case would require, he immediately lets loose every strong feeling connected with his religious views. The first step is not, as we might expect from a judicious examiner, to state plainly the reasons which he was about to refute. Every possible effort is made, on the contrary, to prove that the writer *must be an unbeliever*. Now, in the name of candour, is not this to raise a prejudice, which must unfit both the Reviewer and those for whom he especially wrote, for weighing the reasons of the writer whose work he had un-

dertaken to examine? Will those reasons be the less valid because they may happen to come from a man who does not believe in Christianity? I am so well acquainted with the spirit which appears in this conduct, that I could almost draw a picture—the *Generic* picture I may say—of a writer of this class. I could exhibit the peculiar countenance which a diseased state of feeling, tending to persecution, presents under a variety of modifications. I could sketch the writer when he is “much pained,” when “he is filled with amazement and sorrow,” and when he begins to look wildly for detached texts to right and left. In the high paroxysms which I have seen, under circumstances more favourable to the development of this disease, I have observed the pain and amazement dissolve the zealous person into tears, then lead him to fasting and flagellation, and ultimately strengthen the weakness of his human compassion, so as to enable him to attend the execution of the unfortunate being who caused the “pain and amazement.” It is more than probable that the Reviewer will feel shocked and indignant at this apparent, though not strictly intended comparison, between himself and the fierce bigots whom I have *studied* in the early part of my life. I am far, far indeed from suspecting that he has arrived at the

degree of fiery zeal which I allude to. But I cannot disguise my deep-seated conviction, that whoever patronises the application of "fine and imprisonment" for irreligious opinions, especially if his defence of that law is accompanied by "pain and amazement," has already conceived in his heart the *monster persecution*, which, if favoured in its growth by circumstances, would not be less sanguinary than it has ever shewn itself in other countries and ages. In the name of heaven, and in the most solemn manner, I entreat your Reviewer, and every one who feels as he does, to examine the spirit to which they have opened their hearts: It is not the *Spirit of Christ!*

28. What is meant by honest doubt?

28. "Charity thinketh no evil;" yet this zeal never rests till it has inseparably connected *opposition* to its views and *dishonesty*. The author of *John Search* represents in true colours the inappropriateness of the punishments threatened by the existing law, in the case of a man whose conviction is against the divine origin of Christianity. He represents this man as weighing the testimony which supports the reality of the events or facts adduced by Christians to prove the divine origin of our religion. In the supposed case, the most conscientious Christian must allow the doubting or unbelieving person to consider the whole evidence

as *human testimony*. This is so plain that I can hardly believe my eyes when I read the passages which seem to shew that the Reviewer takes it for granted that the process of proving Christianity to come supernaturally from God, is to begin by the assumption that the Scriptures are of *divine authority*. "Is it consistent (says the Reviewer) with Christian faith, to call the assertions of Holy Scripture 'human statements' and 'human testimony'—'human statements respecting facts affirmed to have taken place in a distant country many ages ago.' Could the veriest sceptic have used language more derogatory to the authority of the Sacred Records? Is this in the spirit in which Peter spoke, in his day, of Holy Scripture? Holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," &c.—p. 146.

Can any thing exceed the confusion of thought which this passage exhibits? Peter spoke of the holy men of old—i. e. *partly* of the writers of the Old Testament—as moved by the Holy Ghost. Therefore, the first step in the examination of the evidence of Christianity is to believe the *inspiration* of the narrative part of the *New Testament*! Those to whom we make the statements of the facts on which we believe the divine origin of the Christian religion, in order that they may be con-

vinced, like ourselves, of that origin, must believe the statements at once to be not *human* but *divine*. Is this consistent with common sense? Because the writer of *John Search* has applied the word *honest*, to doubt concerning the weight of the testimony which proves the divine origin of Christianity, the Reviewer is full of "amazement" at the supposition, that "amongst those to whom the Gospel is propounded, there can be an honest diversity of opinion. Does he indeed mean to declare, that all diversity of opinion on this point *necessarily* arises from dishonesty? Alas! that a pious and sincere Christian, as the Reviewer appears to me, should be thus rivetting unbelief in so many doubting hearts—in a multitude of men who cannot but reject this charge with indignation and scorn, *conscious that it is not true!* Thus it is that a nearer approach to Christ, which would be sufficient to soften many a heart into faith in him, is obstructed by a harshness which revolts, and an ignorance of the human heart which appears like purblind bigotry. Now it is clear that by *honest* doubt the writer of *John Search* wished only to express that doubt which does not arise from *interested* or *sinister motives*.

To question the possibility of such an honest doubt, is a most unfair assumption. And is it the

right of a man who has been a believer from his cradle, to make such an assertion? A man who by God's peculiar blessing was devoted to the belief of Christianity in his infancy, who was instructed in the Christianity of his parents as he would have been in any other religion if they had professed another; one who, when arrived at the age of maturity has read books upon Christian evidence only to *confirm* his previous belief; who probably has read those very books under a constant fear of giving any weight to the objections they answered: a man in such circumstances has much for which to thank heaven; but he should not set up himself as a judge of religious evidences. He should be cautious not to charge with dishonesty a multitude of men, of whose hearts and minds he knows nothing, and can know nothing. He should be less proud of his own belief, for, from every circumstance which we observe in him, it would have been equally positive and violent in favour of any modification of Christianity, however corrupt—nay, in favour of any other religion, if he had been brought up to it. From his disregard of all modifications of character—from his ignorance of the infinite number of circumstances which alter and vary the standard by which the human mind judges of probabilities—from the passionate positiveness

which he seems to use instinctively to strengthen his own belief and scare away doubt—from the eagerness with which he seeks to support his own belief by the sympathetic influence of the belief of others who entirely agree with him—from the vehement dislike he conceives against those who in any way disturb this sympathy—from all these qualities of his mind, it is not rash to conjecture, that as such qualities are applicable to the support of any belief originally imbibed, the same man who is now an ardent Protestant, might have been an equally ardent Romanist, or a most intolerant Brahmin. I do not speak of individuals, I describe a very common case, just as it has frequently come under my observation. With respect to the *honesty* which is so sweepingly denied to unbelievers, I can state, from the unquestionable knowledge which I have of myself, that I, for one, disbelieved *honestly*, that is, without any bad motive. I have been now a believer for many years upon conviction, after a long and laborious search. I am convinced that in *disbelieving* I was wrong—I mean *mistaken*; but of *dishonesty* I never was conscious. What degree of moral guilt might be connected with my former state of judgment, God alone knows. This, however, I positively know; that in my *unbelief*, my love of TRUTH possessed my whole soul. These

are facts which no theory can invalidate. I may add (and ought to add, in justice to many of my friends,) that I have known unbelievers most intimately. Among them I recollect men who could not be surpassed in their love of truth and honesty. But I never knew an unbeliever who was *dishonest* in his unbelief. *Belief* may be counterfeited, and there are many temptations all over the world to affect it; but to pretend *unbelief*, which does not exist—to deny proofs that are really felt to be convincing—is a moral and mental phenomenon with which I have not met within the range of my experience.

39. How differently did Christ and his immediate disciples express themselves concerning the power of religious evidence, and in how much milder colours did they paint the unbelief of their contemporaries! “Father, forgive them, (exclaimed the expiring Jesus on the cross) for they *do not know what they do!*” It would be irreverent, and worst than irreverent, to take these words as a mere unmeaning display of mildness. The reason which our Saviour adds must have been valid and real to his mind. And yet he excuses the ignorance of those who had seen his miracles, and heard his words! Observe the language of Peter to the Jews of Jerusalem: “Ye denied the Holy One and the

39. Estimate of external evidence which we find in Scripture.

Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you—and now brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as (did) also your rulers.”* And what man of the present times can have *external* evidence to be compared with that offered to the inhabitants of the Jewish capital? Yet in spite of it there existed among them an *extenuating*, though not a totally exculpating ignorance. Paul must have had, or might have possessed before his conversion, an evidence of the truth of Christianity *by report*, far more cogent than any that exists *in that shape* (for when speaking of *evidence*, we must not *assume* any supernatural character in our records,) for men who live at the distance of ages from the events. Your Reviewer would display a wonderful ignorance of the nature of evidence if he were to insist on this last-mentioned assumption. Now, Paul, when expressly confessing that he “was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious;” he adds, “but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.”† It is in the *spirit* of these *practical* passages, not in the *abstract* and *general* condemnation of unbelief which is found in the New Testament, that we should judge our brethren, who are less privileged than ourselves in regard to our Gospel promises. Such

* Acts, iii. 14, 17. † 1 Tim. i. 13.

quotations as that from Paul—"this is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance"—"there is salvation in no other name, &c. &c." which your Reviewer brings as proofs that the evidence of Christianity must be convincing, unless there is *dishonesty* to oppose it, could be excused in a young divine, when quoting (and that not very happily) from the Concordance. Your Reviewer's implied argument is, that since no man can be saved but through Christ, the evidence of his divine mission must be cogent in proportion to the number of those concerned in it. But as well might he attempt to prove that since no man can be saved except through Christ, and no man can believe in Christ unless Christ is made known to him; no man in the world can have wanted the opportunity of having the evidence of Christianity presented to him; though the fact is that there are about 400 millions of our living contemporaries, who have not heard the name of Christ. The best commentary on the Scriptures are facts and *realities*. When of two meanings, in any passage, one is opposed by indubitable *facts* or *realities* subject to the senses; the other must unquestionably be the true one. By this rule alone are we justified in disbelieving *transubstantiation*. Let us not forget it on other points. The ruin of theology is conjecture. Divines form their theories,

and then either neglect facts or distort them so as to fit the theory.

40. Real estimate of the power of argumentative evidence.

40. This is just the case in regard to the estimate of the power of the *argumentative* evidence for the divine origin of Christianity. The *scholastic theology*, which like fragments of a mighty ruin, whose plan has been obliterated from the memory of those who take shelter under them, still exists among us, would make Christianity a logical system. The old divines, leaning on the authority of the church, did not much concern themselves about the antecedent proofs of the truth of the religion itself. But the necessity of arranging such an argument was felt, more strongly than in former times, after the Reformation. Great ingenuity and learning have been employed upon this particular point, and the works of Paley will always remain a most valuable monument of those talents of the author which fitted him so remarkably for the office of a *legal advocate*. Every *educated* Christian (for the work is certainly above the *uneducated*,) should be thankful to Paley, as well as to the indefatigable Lardner, who prepared the materials which otherwise would have been beyond the reach of Paley's knowledge.* Much, indeed, as I owe to these

* Paley faithfully transmits the mistakes which Lardner's imperfect scholarship has consigned to his otherwise very valuable

works, I would by no means support the notion that nothing but *dishonesty* can resist their argumentative force. Still less would I countenance the supposition that the divine founder of the Christian religion intended that the propagation of his Gospel, when the miraculous evidence ceased, should depend chiefly on this kind of proof. A more dangerous weapon than this supposition can hardly be put into the hands of the unbeliever. Had Christ commanded his Gospel to be preached to all men over the face of the earth, depending on an evidence which requires, in order to be weighed, extensive knowledge of history and chronology, intimate acquaintance with Greek and Hebrew, accurate study of the proofs of genuineness in manuscripts, and other numerous branches of literature—had Christ expected by this means to make Christianity the religion of mankind, the inference against his ac-

works. Such is the absurd interpretation of Martial's Epigram, *In matutina nuper spectatus arena*, and the more absurd correction, *Thure manu*, which Lardner suggests to make the Epigram apply to the Christians. The other is the translation of *Circense ludicrum* by a "mock Circensian game," which Lardner gives in quoting a passage of Tacitus. Paley copies both blunders, and they remain to this day in every edition, without note or comment. In a Spanish translation of Paley's Evidences, by myself, which was published some years ago without my name, I introduced a note upon the first of these mistakes.

quaintance with the true state of things would be such as no sincere worshipper of the Saviour can contemplate without aversion. All that the argument called *external evidence* can do, is to enable one who is already a Christian to "give a reason of the hope that is in him;" to show that Christianity is not a groundless fable. It may also, as it did in my own case, remove some prejudices which stand in the way of a closer and nearer inquiry of another kind. But it is entirely against my experience, both as to myself and others, to suppose that no candid and honest man can read such books of evidence, and still continue in a state of doubt as to the divine origin of Christianity.

41. Weight
of related
miracles as
evidence.

41. The head-spring of this very common error is a confusion between the power of *miracles seen*, and *miracles testified*. Most readers of works on Christian evidence, because they already believe in the reality of the miracles related in the New Testament, take the *narrative* of those miracles as a supernatural evidence addressed to all mankind. A slight attention to the subject, however, will be enough to convince any thinking person, that *miracles related*, far from being proofs in themselves, are *difficulties* which oppose the ready admission of the testimony of the writers who mention them. The commonest testimony will gain credence to a

common occurrence ; whilst the testimony for an uncommon event must be strong in proportion to the antecedent improbability of the event itself. Hence those very miracles which so effectually and readily convinced the immediate followers of Christ, because the testimony of their senses attested the reality of Christ's supernatural power, are now the greatest difficulty which opposes the reception of the Gospel, in the case of those who have lost the early habit of believing miracles, which a Christian education bestows. That there may be guilt before God in the process by which that habit is lost, I will not deny ; but the difficulty of recovering that habit is extremely great. Now the only way in which the Christian miracles may become evidence, *in narrative*, is a thorough acquaintance with the character of Christ and his apostles. When this has been acquired, every attempt to explain away the Gospel miracles by *natural causes*, and much more, every supposition of artful management in creating the wonder of the multitude, is decidedly rejected by the mind. Then, and not before, it is perceived that the effect of those miracles on the world, is adequate to the cause to which the Scriptures attribute the foundation of Christianity ; and that no other conceivable cause could account for the effect produced—an effect, which, from its first existence, has

continued without interruption to our own days. To come to this conclusion, is no obvious or easy process ; and if the propagation of Christianity had been left to this part of its evidence alone, reason might well allow the doubt, whether its preservation and spread could well be expected without fresh miracles.

42. Evidence promised in the New Testament.

42. But wide from this kind of evidence is that to which Christ trusted his Gospel *in all ages*, when once the miracles, which he and his immediate disciples performed, had fixed the attention of multitudes, and the portion of *divine power*, which a sincere belief in him communicated to the first believers, began to exhibit the uninterrupted proofs of Christ's invisible presence with his true disciples, which he promised to continue unto the end of the world. I am not ashamed of using a language which has certainly been made suspicious by the extravagance of enthusiasts ; for, if every genuine doctrine of the Gospel which has been an occasion of gross error and misconduct, were to be avoided, we should be obliged to give up the whole of Christianity. The notion which a long study of the New Testament records, has fixed on my mind, concerning the evidence which secures the existence and spread of true believers to the end of the world, is this. Christianity is neither a system of metaphysical doctrines

concerning the Divine Being, and his union with the man Jesus, nor concerning the manner in which Christ has obtained pardon and salvation for those who believe in him ; nor yet is Christianity a new system of morals. Christianity is a *living principle* which its Founder has promised to those who will receive him as the Messiah, the Son of God, their spiritual King and Teacher, and thus believing, will accept the promise of this principle, which is called both the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ. This principle is *supernatural*, though it does not show itself (as it did when first imparted on the day of Pentecost, and some time after) in supernatural operations. It is a supernatural and divine power, which more or less rapidly raises the natural mind of the Christian to a state of moral holiness ; which more or less gradually subdues the sinful propensities, and increases the aspirations of the immortal soul after the Eternal Source of its being, through love of *Him* in whom “ dwelleth the Godhead bodily,”—of *Him* “ who loved us and gave himself for us.” Of the manner in which this divine “ power unto salvation” is imparted, and why it seems to court admission into some souls, while it appears as if there existed a repulsion between it and the hearts of others—the writings of the New Testament say nothing that we can reduce to a clear and

definite statement. Neither revelation nor philosophy will ever be able to penetrate into the dark abyss which encircles the human mind at a short distance from the glimmering light by which it has to guide itself into eternity. Every speculation, both theological and philosophical, leads finally to that darkness where all events connected with ourselves take the shape (a false shape, I firmly believe) of immoveable *Fate*. The reasoning faculties of man meet with nothing else (however language may endeavour to disguise it), whether it follows Augustine through his system of Grace and Free-will,—whether it takes Arminius for its guide, or goes back to Zeno and the Stoics, or to Plato and the Academy. With respect to the *evidence*, which alone is capable of making true Christians, we know that “no man comes to Christ unless the Father draws him.” We are told by Paul, that “no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.”* We are assured that the divine seed will be productive only in the “good ground.” Christianity will not appear true to any one who has not previously some point of contact, some analogous principle bestowed on his heart by God. To perceive the divinity which dwells in Christ, and to acknowledge it from that conviction which the New Testament calls saving

* 1 Cor. xii. 3.

faith, there must be already a faculty, however dormant, in the human moral being,—a *spiritual taste* (if I may venture on so bold a metaphor) to which the internal evidence of the Gospel may address itself. Where this faculty has been implanted (for I acknowledge that it is not *natural* to man), the process of conviction which produces true faith will, under a great variety of minor circumstances, be always reducible to this which I am about to state. The person of Christ, or rather the Spirit and character, and power of Christ, as they appear in the New Testament, will be presented to the mind. Collateral arguments and proofs, according to the capacity and circumstances of the hearer, may assist in removing obscurities and doubts. But it will be the moral perception of Christ's divinity that will sooner or later draw out the heartfelt confession—"I believe that thou art the Christ the Son of the living God." Much more indeed may, and will, grow out of this first seed of divine life. Moral fruits will certainly follow in all cases; the pregnant truth thus originally accepted will probably develop itself into a greater or less comprehension of the relations which the great facts of the mystery of redemption bear to us. But whatever may be the extent or limitation of this knowledge—nay, even in spite of positive errors of speculation, the faith which I have

described—the acceptance of Christ as a Saviour, and the lively trust in his promises of spiritual power to overcome sin, in this life, and of eternal happiness in the next, are secured. The consciousness of this state, which each individual may have, constitutes the highest degree of certainty which the subject admits. This consciousness may produce more or less *assurance*, for assurance is a mere feeling, subject to a variety of extraneous influences. But the least degree of hope, which true faith can give, is above every possible degree which ARGUMENT can produce on such matters. The apostle John positively tells all true Christians, without distinction, that they have in themselves the *true witness*; and I believe the same thing of Christians of all ages past, present, and future. I shall only add, that this *witness* is valid in regard to the hopes of each individual; but he must not force his testimony upon others.

43. Injustice of the demands which the Reviewer makes on the strength of the external evidence.

43. As it appears to me that your Reviewer is too much of a true Christian to question the substance of the above statement, I must fear that the activity of that bitter root of persecution which lurks, unknown to him, in his heart, must be great, since it can betray him into the strange assertions which he ventures upon the external evidence of Christianity. His “amazement,” “his pain,” “his grief” come again upon him, when he finds the following words in *John Search* :

“ At all events—with respect to the law of the case—if assurance in this matter can never amount strictly to *knowledge*, is it just to punish a man for professing disbelief of that which no man can *know* to be true?”

“ What a fearful saying (exclaims the Reviewer) —no man can know the religion of Christ to be true!! We cannot but pity the man that wrote this; he certainly does not know the religion of Christ to be true.”—And here he seizes upon several passages of Scripture, only because they contain the word *known* in connection with religion.—“ To what end, in this case (he goes on), did the Saviour say, ‘ This is eternal life to *know* thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent?’ Was Paul a boaster and a hypocrite when he said, ‘ I *know* whom I have believed,’ &c. &c.” Is it not melancholy to see such a *verbal* quibble brought as Scripture authority?—The author of *John Search*, if he should happen to be a doubter, will certainly not be assisted in his investigation by this kind of biblical doctrine.—John Search (as it appears from the whole paragraph from which those words are taken, and from a very acute and philosophical note on the sense of the terms “ matter of fact,” which deserves, and shall obtain a place at the

bottom of this page *) asserts that all *matter of fact* whatever, rests by necessity on moral evidence. After considering the human law which threatens with punishment any one who shall declare that the *moral evidence* which attests to us at this distance of time the facts from which *many* of the eye-witnesses of them inferred the divine origin of Christianity, is not sufficient; he ends by the observation contained in the words above-mentioned. Now it is evident that the author does not mean to assert that no

* "In the foregoing remarks, I might be thought by some to have *confounded* the sense of the terms "matter of fact" and "matter of opinion." To such I would allege, in excuse, the very and inconveniently vague manner in which these and similar phrases are commonly used, which makes it difficult to *fix* them to a meaning, by appeal to any acknowledged standard. Vague as they are, I might perhaps be safe in assuming that, *primarily*, the term "matter of fact" did *not* signify *established or ascertained* fact,—though in common parlance it sometimes takes that sense; nor again—according to another and more frequent use of it—*alleged or debateable* fact,—in which sense the term "*true*" or "*false*" might be predicated of it: but rather *QUESTION* of fact, (thus excluding those epithets,) as opposed to "matter of *opinion*," &c.—*i. e.* matter or question of *pure* opinion, facts being agreed on. Thus, *e. g.*, whether a man has committed a robbery, is matter (or question) of *fact*: and whether, if so, he ought to be hanged, is matter (or question) of *opinion*. Yet, forasmuch as the latter term has come, in popular use, to signify *any* sort of matter or question which is open to difference of opinion, it is plain that, in this popular sense, any matter or question of *fact* must be (*while* questionable) matter of *opinion* too:—*i. e.* the *validity of its evidence* is such."—*John Search, p. 36.*

man can be sure of the truth of Christianity. This is the Reviewer's construction. What *John Search* affirms is, that a person who decides only upon the *moral evidence*,—the testimony of the writers in the New Testament as mere witnesses,—cannot arrive at that degree of certainty which, philosophically speaking, is called *knowledge*—*ἐπιστήμη*.—And I fully agree with him. It is unquestionably true, “that life eternal depends on the *knowledge* of God (a true acquaintance with his designs towards us, and his promises), and a similar *knowledge* of Christ, as he reveals his Father to us. But there is not a word in the passage, thus misapplied, about the *external evidence* of Christianity being a demonstration which can produce *scientific knowledge*. Still more strange is the mention of Paul's *knowledge* of the Saviour, as a proof that the external evidence of Christianity must produce a similar knowledge. If the Reviewer's zeal had not hurried him, could he thus have compared the case of a man whom the law of England punishes for declaring that the external evidence of Christianity is not a conclusive proof, with the most remarkable instance of the grace of God which is mentioned in the New Testament records? Because Paul *knew* Christ, whom he had seen in his triumphant glory,—because Paul who had received the most extraordinary communications of which

man ever heard in the history of *supernatural* gifts, *knew Christ*, are we to conclude that Paley's Evidences, or any evidences of that kind, are a demonstration, to which every man should assent, and from which he cannot expressly and publicly dissent, without deserving "fine, imprisonment, or some other infamous bodily punishment!"

44. Example of punishable doubts.

44. It is on this occasion, however, that the Reviewer, by torturing his ingenuity in search of some *doubt* justly punishable by human laws, has involuntarily done as much for the cause of perfect freedom of opinion and expression, as any of its advocates could wish. I must be allowed to bring forward, in the Reviewer's own words, a passage which seems to have been written in a spirit of logical triumph:—

"The proposition put forward in this question is this:—In any case where assurance cannot amount to knowledge, it is unjust to punish a man for professing his disbelief. Let us try this principle in another case. The assurance with which any inhabitant of this country can receive the fact that William IV. is the son of George III., and therefore rightful king of the United Kingdom of England and Ireland, cannot amount strictly to knowledge; therefore it would be unjust to punish a man for professing his disbelief that William IV. is

the lawful king of these realms. We would ask is this a good argument? If a man was tried on a charge of treason for endeavouring to turn men from their allegiance to the king, would it be a valid plea in his defence, that assurance in this matter never could, with him, amount to knowledge, and therefore he had a right to lead all other people to refuse him allegiance as king? If, then, his assurance, not amounting to knowledge, is no warrant for freedom of discussion in the case of an earthly king, why must it be in the case of the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords? We cannot help thinking that in the statement of uncertainty necessarily attached to our belief of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, there is very false religion; but (even were the fact admitted for argument's sake) it is very bad logic to conclude from thence that it is unjust to restrain a man from endeavouring to turn others from the faith. The reasons which may make it fit that law should restrain a man from insulting one Being and injuring many others may be, and indeed must be, drawn from something very different than the degrees of his knowledge or his ignorance.”*

Most certainly : and if the Reviewer's logic had accustomed him to examine more accurately his own notions, and not to allow them to run con-

* Page 150.

fusedly from one subject into another under the cover of an apparent similarity of language, he might have derived considerable instruction from his last proposition, which, by chance, contains the master-key of the whole question. Is *knowledge* or *belief* the object of any civil law? Has the order of succession to the throne been settled in any civilized country upon the principle that physical descent, and the qualities of the *breed*, support the constitution and peace of society? No sooner has this question been put than a clear light diffuses itself over the whole question in hand; and the fallacy which recommends the protection of religion by law, from a false analogy with the protection which the law *must* give to other things, is instantly dispelled.

45. The law not concerned with truth.

45. Human laws, the laws by which the peace of society is maintained, have no concern with *truth* as *truth*; their object being the organization and support of an *artificial* body, they openly avail themselves not only of artificial means but of *open fictions*. Thus, one of the most important maxims of the English constitutional law is a proposition, containing a self-evident false assertion. *The king can do no wrong*, is nevertheless one of the wisest legal *fictions* that ever experience dictated. The object of the fiction is to make the

king *irresponsible*, and his person *sacred*. This practical object is secured by this means in such a manner that, while the fundamental laws of the kingdom are respected, there is no danger of missing it. But who can suppose that this constitutional law demands the belief that the king is a perfect being? The same happens in regard to the law of succession. In order to preclude the great evils of uncertainty, and the occasion which uncertainty, in regard to the person who is to occupy the throne, would give to the intrigues of ambition, certain *artificial* marks are fixed by which the rightful king is to be recognized. Legitimacy of birth is one; and that legitimacy is to be ascertained by *law*. Every person born *in wedlock*, if the parents have, or may have, cohabited during a certain period, is legitimate, and this is as much applicable to the succession on the throne as to an inheritance of a few pounds. The object of the law is therefore in all cases, not that such or such thing should be believed or not—not the *truth* of the thing itself; but the prevention of some *overt act*. Knowledge, therefore, or conviction, has nothing to do in the case proposed by the Reviewer. As that person must be the legitimate king whom the law of succession declares to be the *legitimate heir*, and this legitimacy is not grounded on the *truth* of the

descent, but on the legal marks of that descent, no doubt, or even certainty of *natural* illegitimacy, can justify a person in questioning the right of the *sovereign* who is legitimate according to law. Even the declaration of a mother is justly disregarded in such cases. In this there is no invasion of the individual rights of conscience or conviction. The law does not conceal its object. The legislature does not assume a knowledge of any one truth to which it commands every individual judgment to bow. The stability of the throne, and a peaceful succession to it, are *practical* objects, for the attainment of which *practical* means are employed. No government was ever so absurd as to demand belief in the unspotted virtue of every queen or princess on which the physical reality of the succession depends. And it would be difficult to decide whether absurdity or tyranny would predominate in a law which should forbid the teaching of the formula, in which La Place gives the value of the chances of a *true* succession through a certain number of generations, on the ground that such a formula may unsettle the allegiance of every people in Europe.

46. Necessity of never losing sight of the proper ob-

46. If the Reviewer, and those who think with him on the subject of the law against irreligious libel, would steadily keep in view the real object of

the authority possessed by the civil government, and would limit the notion of that object by the consideration of the means which legislatures possess for making good laws ; if they were careful not to glide insensibly from the ground of *abstract* truth, to the ground of *expediency*, for the justification of civil laws concerning religious profession ;— if they could surmount the *feelings* which are gratified when *sin* is punished as *crime* ; the question would soon be settled : and the unmeaning declamation about the temporal punishment due to the man who endeavours to *turn others from the faith*, because it is turning them from allegiance to their heavenly king, would cease to expose religion to hatred and ridicule. Since the KING whose kingdom the unbelievers oppose, has threatened (whatever the definite meaning of the expression may be, and in whatever proportion it may apply to unbelievers who have not seen his miracles,) that *his enemies which would not that he should reign over them, shall be slain before him* ; why should any king or authority of this world undertake to punish them before hand, as if almighty power, and almighty truth, wanted their blind and feeble assistance? *Deorum injuriæ Diis curæ*, should be considered a maxim more truly applicable and worthy of Christian than of Pagan governments. The

ject of civil laws. *Deorum injuriæ Diis curæ* more applicable to Christian than to Pagan governments.

ancient religions, which were used as engines to assist political purposes, were in every respect, similar to the *fictions* which the law of England employs for the most important practical objects. Since the *belief* in the abstract truth of the religion of the country was not demanded, but only conformity with certain external actions which were established for the purpose of assisting the civil laws; punishment for open opposition to those religious customs might be considered in that light in which the English law would see an open and practical opposition to its most important *fictions*. If the rights of every individual conscience to declare its own TRUTH, i. e. its own conviction, are denied, the Christians who openly refused to burn a handful of incense before the images of the emperors, were public offenders, and deserved their fate. For the Roman law did not (as some say of the existing law of libel) interfere with *opinions*, nor did it require a declaration that the religion of the country was true. Exactly like the existing law of England which occupies our attention, it only wished to prevent the open denial and contempt of the religion of the country. But such a defence of the law of libel is totally inconsistent with the belief in the existence of *one true revelation from God*. I do not mean to assert that every one who employs that kind of defence must

necessarily consider all religions as equally true and equally false. I speak only of the *logical* opposition and inconsistency of the belief in one true religion, and the acknowledgment of a right in every government to defend, by penalties, whatever religion they prefer. Nothing, however, is more common among men (even men of educated minds) than blindness to such logical contradictions.

47. Persons, who like your Reviewer, show so many unquestionable marks of their sincere love of the religion of Christ, should seriously consider, that if what they recommend to governments in defence of Christianity cannot be clearly made out to be a *Christian duty*, their conduct must fall within the class of things which the religion of Christ condemns *as sins*. *Restrictions sanctioned by penalties* cannot be ranked with *things morally indifferent*, even if they were recommended in a manner which would limit the operation of such restrictions to the support of Christianity. Much less can those restrictions be morally indifferent, when, if the right of imposing them is granted to a Christian government, it must be equally granted to governments *unchristian* as well as *corruptedly Christian*. Let not this be lost sight of, I entreat. Let not the ground be shifted from *expediency* (of which governments are essentially and exclusively

47. Is not the approval of penal laws in matters of religion, sinful?

judges placed over the *governed*) to *truth*, of which, they, as governments, know no more than other men. Since, then, *restrictions sanctioned by penalties* cannot be indifferent in the eyes of Him who gave us the golden rule of *doing to others as we wish to be done by*, every Christian is entitled to ask from his fellow Christians, who recommend such restrictions, upon what *Christian* ground they patronize them? I have said that every man is entitled to put that question to his *fellow Christians*, because, in regard to men who believe no religion, such a proceeding is natural, and just that which might be expected. Now, in the name of our common hope through Christ, (I entreat my fellow believers,) let us dispassionately examine this point. Is there any *literal* command in the New Testament for using *penalties* in defence of Christianity? The ingenuity of the whole body of the clergy was actively employed for many ages in search of proofs to support the system of restriction which the church employed. And let it be observed, that what they wanted to find, were not proofs for this or that *degree of restriction*, but for *restriction by penalties* in general. And what did they find? The most plausible support which the New Testament afforded them, the best authority on which *penal restrictions* have been put into practice from the

fifth century to the present day, is founded in the ignorance of the Greek language, which Augustine openly confesses of himself. The word *compelle*, which the Vulgate uses in translating the Greek word *αναγκασον* in the parable of the Supper, (Luke xiv. 23.) and which the English version has also expressed by *compel*, is the strongest ground which the patrons of penalties for dissent in religion have ever found in the New Testament. So much for the letter of those holy records; but what shall we say of the *spirit* of those records, on this point? Let those who listen to the voice of, what they believe to be, godly zeal, make a comparison of the spirit which urges them, with the spirit which urged the apostles James and John to wish for fire from heaven to punish the rejection of their divine master by the Samaritans. (Luke, ix. 52, 55.) Let them avoid the evasion which the difference between *fire*, and *fine, imprisonment, and infamous bodily punishment* presents; for he who could have brought down fire from heaven, could certainly have modified and apportioned the check, demanded by the two disciples, to the magnitude of the offence, and the circumstances of the guilty. Christ, however, does not reproach James and John for cruelty, or blame them on account of any disproportion between the punishment and the guilt. He con-

demns *the spirit* by which they had been deceived :
 “ Ye know not what manner of *spirit* ye are of.”
 Need I add every instance of absolute forbearance on the part of Christ and his apostles, when the latter had received his holy spirit? Could the author of that religion which subdued the civilized world to itself by *patience* and *endurance*, that religion which, till it was associated with the kingdoms of this world, only asked for a *hearing*—could Jesus, who triumphed by suffering on the cross, intend that when his religion should be taken up by governments, as a convenient help for keeping the people in obedience to them, they should support it by penalties? The force of truth on this point, must, I fear, be weakened by any thing like argument. A Christian who does not perceive the *spirit* of the New Testament on this subject, would not be persuaded if “ one should rise from the dead” to convince him.

48. Just limitations to the freedom of speech or writing.

48. But it is time for me to conclude. I cannot, however, omit one point, without touching on which, I should not feel satisfied that I had done to the cause I defend, that degree of justice which my ability (whatever it may be) and my exhausted bodily strength permit. The most powerful reasons in favour of perfect freedom of speech and writing, lose their power, in some minds, the

moment that the idea of a flood of impiety and immorality presents itself to them, as the necessary consequence of the repeal of the existing law. The objection is instantly raised—"shall we allow every sort of barrier against demoralization to be removed, and *tracts*, representing vicious persons as having nothing to fear in a future life, be disseminated among the young and the ignorant?" Your Reviewer urges that *Christianity is the foundation of all human law . . . that Christianity is the parent of the law.** Before I answer the proposed objection, I must endeavour to remove this strange confounding of Christianity, with the morality about which the human laws are concerned. Where is the foundation of the assertion that *Christianity is the foundation of all human laws*? If it had been said that true Christianity, were it to exist in a whole community, would supersede the necessity of criminal laws, the proposition would be perfectly true. If it is meant that the actions which human laws forbid are also forbidden by Christianity, an unquestionable truth is asserted; but the proposition that "*Christianity is the foundation of all human laws,*" must be considered as very unfit to convey that notion. Surely human societies have existed and prospered before Christianity was announced to the world; and the millions of men who live under hu-

man laws without Christianity, are nearly three times more numerous than all the Christians of all denominations together. It is a truth which no one who is acquainted with the moral and legislative history of mankind can easily overlook, that the duties, without the observance of which society cannot exist, not only arise from the natural relations of man to man, but have their seeds so abundantly scattered in the natural constitution of mankind, as to be easily developed, by gradual civilization, into a very high *social* order. That true Christianity, i. e. the spiritual principle which properly deserves that name, raises man far above the line to which that social developement can reach, every Christian will be ready to declare. But that without Christianity no human law can exist, "*because human laws have no other foundation,*" is an exaggeration the use of which I cannot account for in the writings of an educated man. Look at the criminal statutes of a most enlightened Christian state—that, I mean, to which you belong by birth, and I myself by favour of its own laws,—look at the laws which forbid the various crimes for which men are tried in our courts, and you will see how perfectly independent they are of Christianity, as a moral rule. Neither adultery, nor fornication, nor want of parental or of filial love, nor ingratitude, nor covetousness, nor

envy, nor malice, nor any of a very long list of vices condemned by Christianity, are made the subject of any criminal law. And it is wisely done. Practical wisdom has led legislators to perceive that nothing can be properly and usefully punished by human laws, but actions which would be revenged by the injured party, if that party had the power of revenge, in an uncivilized state. Where there is neither violence, nor fraud of that kind which the defrauded could not easily detect,* human law cannot properly punish. Seduction is therefore only compensated as a *damage*. Fraud is punished upon a similar principle, namely, that the person on whom the fraud was practised has a right to complain. In what conceivable way then, can Christianity be said to be the *foundation* of such criminal law? In regard to the fears, that tracts recommending the commission of immoral (though not *illegal* actions) might multiply, if people were allowed to deny the truth of Christianity; I have to answer, that, independently of the intole-

* I beg to observe, by the way, that upon the same ground, (though with much more reason) that the seduction of a woman is not considered a *crime* by the law, the seduction of any one from Christianity, by means of argument, cannot come properly under the cognizance of that law; for a woman cannot be seduced against her will; much less can a person who is convinced by reasons, however feeble, either appear or be listened to as prosecutor for any degree of *violence*.

rant law in question, and within the proper limits of human law, the other laws of the kingdom are prepared (I believe) and might easily be made still more able and ready to meet that evil. I conceive that whoever by word or writing encourages the commission of any deed which the criminal law condemns, is amenable to punishment as *abettor or accessory before the fact*. I am, however, at this moment treading upon ground not well known to me, and may be mistaken as to what I have just stated. But I conceive that the Act which should repeal the present law of libel in regard to religion, might expressly make it penal to employ an unlimited freedom of assertion as to the truth or falsehood of any point of religious belief, for the *direct and express encouragement of any immoral action*. In respect to *indecentcy*, whatever falls within the duty of a well regulated *police* to check, should also be checked when it appears in prints or writings. Such restraints and their penal sanctions, may properly be classed with the natural objects of human laws. When a man is actually employed in the commission of *evil* to the injury of society—an evil known by *experience*, and not *conjectural*—an evil which actually presents itself, not one which, according to some men's opinions, is supposed to lurk within some intellectual view, as in a *seed*—when a man is

directly and explicitly urging the commission of such an evil, human law does not transgress its proper boundaries by checking him. But to punish supposed *tendencies*, to condemn men for the *conjectural* consequences of their opinions—consequences which in all probability exist only in the mind of those who condemn him, would be the most horrible tyranny which could be practised in a highly civilized society. It would be applying punishment to a supposed crime, in the case of which the penalty has only one measure—the *apprehensions* of those who punish. If an Atheist is believed to be necessarily led by his error to the commission of all manner of crimes, with the same irresistible propensity that a poisonous serpent is led to use its fangs, then the treatment of both must be the same. And who can tell how many other views of the human mind may be found, by conjecture, to be *capable* of producing actions which deserve capital punishment? Once admit the principle of punishing crimes (to use the expression of the schoolmen) *in potentia*; crimes which *may* come into existence—and the gallows will bend with murderers and traitors *in the bud*. And here again I beg the candid reader to avoid the evasion—that the existing law does not punish with *death*. The slightest punishment upon conjectural ground is equally *unjust* with the

heaviest. But who that respects himself and the order of beings to which we belong in the creation, will call it a slight punishment to be obliged to submit his understanding, and the faculty of expressing his thoughts, to the will of others? To see a number of his fellow-citizens not only allowed to publish their convictions and the reasons on which they ground them, but *rewarded* for enjoying that gratification; and to be obliged by penalties to suppress one's own convictions and the reasons on which they are grounded, because they do not agree with the favoured doctrines, is worse than death to men who value their highest natural privileges. The man who declines being a martyr to the assertion of these rights, deserves, in my opinion, to be a slave.

49. No danger equal to that to which the existing law exposes Christianity.

49. If my profession of Christianity happened to run in the same direction with my temporal comforts, I should feel obliged to make high protestations of my interest in it, lest the preceding views might be supposed to be the result of secret hostility to the Gospel. But, I thank God that he has placed me in circumstances which require no such precautions. The same vehement aversion to external acquiescence in what I believed to be false, which made me quit the country where I was born, would still carry me away from that which has adopted me, if, disbelieving Christianity, the law prevented my

saying so. I would save even the last days of my existence from that state of intellectual and moral degradation. I mention, however, these personal feelings in connexion with my concluding observation, on the supposed dangers of perfect freedom of speech on religious matters.—The greatest danger to Christianity with which I am acquainted (and my experience has some claims to attention,) is that to which the existing law exposes it. There are not many men, I believe, who would, and could leave a country where they are made to bow to the convictions of others, in spite of their own. These will yield to necessity, but, for the most part, such men know how to revenge their outraged feelings on the very object of their oppressors' worship. Look at the state to which France had been brought, just before the Revolution, in regard to religion, by the protection which the laws gave it. Threats, and instances of severe punishment, were insufficient to repress the circulation of books and pamphlets against it. The use of the grossest indecencies, of the broadest ridicule, of the most bitter insults, was justified in the opinion of multitudes, when contrasted with the unfair advantages which power gave to those against whom these weapons were used. Thus it will always happen. But the case of this country, though widely different in regard to coercion on religious

subjects, appears to me still more exposed to the evil effects of a restraint however slight. The poorer classes of France, just before the revolution, with the exception of those who lived in great cities, were not so much alive to this subject as the similar classes in England are at this moment. This may appear to some people a reason for additional restraint ; but to me it seems a strong argument for exactly the contrary. On any subject whatever, that is the most dangerous fallacy which is most easily seized upon by the multitude. Now, arguments against Christianity are not easily understood by an uneducated person ; and, in many instances, the previous habits of one trained, however imperfectly, under a sense of respect for the religion of Christ, will revolt at the first contact with gross and bold impiety. But the argument which may be drawn from a prohibition to declare that Christianity is not a divine revelation, is not exposed to these checks. The irritated enemy of Christianity—irritated, I mean, by the law which protects religion by threats and penalties—need not fatigue his clownish reader by an argument which refers to history, or to criticism, for its proof. “ My friends (the gagged infidel may say), the law forbids me to tell you all I know on the subject of religion ; and I will not offend against the law. Those, however, who have made, and those who support that

law, have very powerful reasons to do so. The same is done, you must be aware, in all other countries. Governments which depend on the religion of Mahomet (for instance) for obedience, payment of taxes, and other things of this kind, on the part of the ignorant people, will not allow any one to deny the truth of the religion of Mahomet. It is all consistent, my friends. But I can say no more. Were it not, however, for the law, I might tell you very curious facts. But, good bye, the favourite law of the parsons stops my mouth."

The law must, I think, *be ground* extremely fine before it could reach such statement ; but what work from Carlile's shop could be more effectual in bringing about that which the existing law is intended to prevent? Every argument against Christianity has a satisfactory answer ; the suspicion raised by the law has none. Every argument against Christianity is confined more or less within certain limits ; this notion of a *great secret* against it, is boundless. Under a perfect freedom of speaking and writing, both the uneducated, and those whose education does not make them competent judges of the critical question connected with the genuineness of the Scriptures, may rely on the fact, that whatever reasons may exist against it, have been brought to light ; and, since those who are conversant with ancient languages

and manuscripts are agreed upon the substantial genuineness, and nothing new has been brought forth by the opponents, an unlearned man may consider the fact as proved.* But this ground for rational assent to the conclusions of other men, is removed the moment that the unlearned become aware that the opponents are not at full liberty. I shall endeavour to illustrate this by a comparison.—The demonstration of the Newtonian theory of gravitation is within the actual reach of a comparatively small number of persons, because few submit to the preparatory course of study which that demonstration demands. Yet, relying on the conviction of those who have taken proper pains to examine the subject, the whole of the educated population of Europe receives that theory as a *truth*. Even persons who have had the lowest degree of intellectual cultivation, usual among us, might give a reasonable assent to the truth of the Newtonian theory, if the state of the case were simply presented to their minds. But imagine that parliament, out of respect

* I cannot recollect in which of the works of my learned and ingenious friend, Dr. Samuel Hinds, this argument in favour of the sufficiency of the popular evidence of the genuineness of the Scriptures is to be found. The argument is worthy of the acuteness of the mind that proposed it; but its force will be limited by the existence of any legal restraint on arguments which might conclude against the genuineness of the Bible.

to Sir Isaac Newton, and considering the perverseness and obstinacy of mind which the denial of his theory betrays, had subjected the open and direct opponents of it to fine and imprisonment. Suppose again, that, by virtue of that statute, Mr. Frend and Sir R. Phillips had suffered, and complained, as they might justly do, to the public, of this treatment—I ask, would the Newtonian theory gain or loose in the opinion of that mass of people who must rely upon others for their belief in it? Would not some improper bias—some interested motive, be instantly suspected to exist among the powerful patrons of the theory? Could any opposition, by means of physical or mathematical objections, be so injurious to the belief in that theory, as the simple and comprehensible argument, that since force was employed, some *reason* must exist, which could not be allowed to take its course freely?

I will not, Mr. Editor, request your attention to any more topics on the subject of this long letter: I only entreat it in favour of the following

COLLECTIVE VIEW.

I. Those who believe that every government has a right to limit the liberty of speech in matters of religion, should not assume this position as an axiom requiring no proof.

50. Collective view of the argument.

II. The argument from the natural authority of parents to choose a religion for their children, has no force as an analogy, and involves a contradiction to the pretended axiom. (1) It has no force as an analogy, because childhood is clearly marked by nature for subjection *in every respect*; whilst no part of mankind have received such a badge of slavery: childhood is temporary;—the subjection contended for, would be *perpetual*. (2) The argument from the authority of parents over children, is contradictory to the position. For if governments have a right to limit the liberty of speech on matters of religion, they must have that right in regard to parents. It would be mockery to suppose, that in England, for instance, such as deny the truth of Christianity, are subject to penalties, *except when they teach their children that opinion*. If the object of the penalty, and of the supposed right to impose and enforce it, is to prevent the spread of such opinions, parents cannot be allowed to impress them on their children's minds. Therefore, the assertion of the right contended for in favour of governments, implies the absence of the right of parents to teach their children what they themselves believe to be true: an assertion which denies the *natural* right, on the analogy of which the political right is contended for.

III. The assertion of a right in each supreme government to limit the expression of opinions concerning religion, is *logically* inseparable from the notion that all religions are equally true and equally false ; i. e. that the fear of something invisible, supported by external forms or tenets adapted to the habits and notions of each people, is good and useful to society ; but that there is no other truth, except that, at the bottom of any religious system. For if there is but *one revelation* from heaven, which deserves the name of religion, it cannot be supposed that governments have an equal right to support that, or any other, by penalties. An equal right in governments to sanction any religion by penalties, necessarily excludes the consideration of *abstract* truth. That right must exist, whether the governments choose right or wrong ; else that right would imply an equal success secured to all governments in the choice of the one *true* religion (which, since they all widely differ, we perceive they have not,) or the right would be subjected to some higher authority—a pope, or an infallible body of clergymen, who should, in fact, leave the governments themselves no choice. The governments, in such case, would be only means of compulsion in the hands of that authority.

IV. The notion of a *right* is inseparable from that of a correlative *duty*. If governments have a *right* (the idea of right embraces, of course, the idea of justice) to maintain some one religion by penalties, the subjects must be under a *duty* (a duty means, of course, one *morally* binding) not to oppose that religion. If any one therefore (say a Mahometan) should be converted to Christianity, he would be guilty of a moral offence if he should endeavour, to persuade his countrymen to receive his new religion. Besides, as every man is bound to respect the *duties* of other men to their respective governments, there can be no doubt that, on the supposition of which I am speaking, every missionary is guilty of a moral offence,—every English society which sends the Bible translated into foreign languages, must be morally considered in the light of a conspiracy to make thousands and millions of human beings neglect, and act contrary to, one of the moral duties which they owe to their respective governments.

V. Finally ; as it is a fact, proved by the consciousness of every human being, that our angry passions are ready to rise up whenever we are charged with *error*, and that this anger and irritation is great in *proportion to the difficulty of refuting the charge and convincing the objector*,

(circumstances intimately connected with religious questions,) the patrons of penal laws for the protection of Christianity have a strong ground for suspecting the source of their zeal in favour of such laws. It cannot be respect for the *abstract right of governments*; for the advocates of the existing law *deny* that the legislature of this country, for instance, has a right to change the religion which the law now protects, for another; and they highly approve of the oaths which bind the king (without whose assent no law can be made) not to use his judgment in this matter; but to be confined forever to the judgment of a legislature which existed several ages ago. The ground for suspecting the *source* of the opinion in favour of the existing law of libel becomes stronger when it is considered that among the *jarring decisions* of the ancient legislatures of this kingdom, concerning religion, the patrons of penal laws attribute that one decision alone to the *wisdom of the nation*, which agrees with their own views. It seems therefore clear, that by the right of the supreme government to establish and protect a religion, they understand the *right to do so*, when the government is on their side.

That God may give weight to these reasons in

your mind, in that of your Reviewer, as well as in that of the public at large, if they are (as I believe) favourable to real Christianity ;—or cause them to be rejected if they can in the least injure it, is the prayer of,

Dear Sir,

Your obedient, humble Servant,

J. B. W.

Dublin, March 21st, 1834.

POSTSCRIPT.

As I could not decline taking notice of a pamphlet upon this subject, published within the last few days, without making an opening to the suspicion of its containing something which may materially weaken the force of my argument, I must still trespass a little longer upon your patience.

The author of that reply to *John Search's Considerations*, begins by quoting a passage from Lord Bolingbroke, where that well-known unbeliever asserts the right of civil society, and of the authority which represents it, to impose restraint on the publication of opinions against the religion of the state. S. N. (for so the author of the *reply* designates himself) seems to have considered this passage as one which must crush *John Search* to atoms. S.N. cannot understand how the writer, who assumes that name, could *disregard such an authority*; and endeavours to explain this phenomenon by the

supposition that *John Search* was ignorant "that it could be quoted against him." This is strange, indeed. Could the venerable writer (I give him that title, because he describes himself as a very old clergyman) suppose that unbelievers (for such he conceives John Search to be) recognize a succession of Popes, one of whom was Lord St. John, of Chelsea? But not to waste time, I beg leave to refer to that part of my letter where I have shewn that none but *unbelievers* can consistently demand for the state the right of restraining the expression of opinions, in order to protect the religion which the civil authority takes under its protection. A man who thinks that all religions are equally true and equally false—who sees in them only a better or worse instrument to assist the supreme magistrate in the business of civil government—such a man may consistently, and (according to his views) *justly*, demand a tacit approbation of any established religion. S. N. might easily have collected a long list of authorities, similar to that of Bolingbroke. Hume, Gibbon, and above all, Hobbes, take the same view; and I do not well see how any Tory, (i. e. one who thinks that the people cannot be governed *too much*,) if he happens to be also an unbeliever, could permit any one to oppose

that *form* of religion which is established in any country whatever. The great difficulty in this matter is to explain how any man who believes that *one*, and but *one*, religion is true, and all the rest false and mischievous, can allow governments not only to give a preference to any of them, (a right which I do not deny,) but also to exclude all possibility of their choice being proved to be wrong. But I need not add to what I have already said on this point.

A great part (perhaps the greater part) of the Reply is, employed in endeavouring to prove that the writer of the *Considerations* is an *unbeliever*, and very *astute* withal. S. N. thinks that this exposure of the opinions (as he conceives) of the author, is important to the public, because there is "a general laziness, which leads to acquiescence in what is put forward as an argument, and to believe in what is stated as a fact."—(p. 8.) I really never found this *laziness*, except when people read *arguments* and *facts* which support their own opinions. The general propensity in people is to stop their ears, or allow their prejudices to blind them, in opposition to every one who attempts to disturb their previously settled notions.

S. N. in the next place wishes to make us believe

that *John Search* has represented the law as more strict than it really is. He allows (for how could such a matter of fact be denied) that judges apply it with more or less latitude, according to their own opinions. Yet those *opinions* are not law. A poor consolation for the wretch who suffers fine and imprisonment in consequence of the *judgment* which is passed upon him.

But S. N. thinks unbelievers very unreasonable, because, being in no danger from the rack, and other ingenious means of ascertaining their true opinions, they are nevertheless impatient, and will not hold their tongue. *John Search* (he says) “sneers at this freedom of private opinion, with, *how privileged!* Yes certainly (S. N. proceeds) and valuable is the privilege. Are the laws against heretics forgotten? Did this writer never hear of persons seized merely on suspicion, and articles being exhibited to them to subscribe, sentenced to the flames on their refusal?” (Page 26.) This is, certainly a curious and novel view of *privileges*. According to this view every man who escapes being empaled at the discretion of an autocrat or sultan, enjoys a *privilege*. “Yes, certainly, and valuable is the privilege.” I agree with S. N.

S. N. quotes several expressions of *John Search*

—such as “the delicate, sensitive, and shrinking vitality of Christianity”—as proofs both of his infidelity and of his artfulness. I repeat that I know nothing about *John Search's* creed. But as *Christianity* is not a *person*, those expressions must apply to *Christians*. And if any Christian, in his anxiety to support the existing law, appears *delicate*, *sensitive*, and *shrinking* in regard to the religion he professes, he is to blame for giving such a handle to those who imagine that if *Christianity* was a *person*, it would feel in a similar manner.

The writer of the Reply proceeds to defend the existing law, by representing the practical liberty which opponents of Christianity enjoy under it as boundless. “A writer (he says, p. 16.) might publish a book to prove that all the doctrines and precepts of Christianity were discoverable by natural reason, and though such a book might be considered as unfavourable to Christianity, yet, if the author did not *deny* the truth of Christianity, he would not be prosecuted.” I cannot conceive a stronger proof of a law being nugatory than the fact, that it allows *that* to be *actually done* which it intended to prevent.

At page 20, we find the assertion that “the law does not protect *even Christianity in general*

from censure : that it cannot be resorted to, except in the extreme case of an actual denial of the truth of Christianity, or of the divine authority of the Holy Scriptures." What kind of *censure*, then, is allowed by the law ? In a question about *truth*, what can be *censure* but the charge of error, direct or implied ? But after all, what is *Christianity in general* ? What sort of *generalization* is this, by which a *whole*, consisting of doctrines, the truth of every one of which may be denied, must, nevertheless be declared to be true ? What kind of *general truth* is this, which does not suffer from the assertion that every *particular* in it is false ? Can any representation of the existing law be made to imply a stronger suspicion against, I will not say the judgment, but the *sanity* of those that enacted it ? But the truth is, that such a contradictory law was never conceived among men of any age or nation. The law, which has gradually mouldered into this shapeless, and threatening ruin, was definite and consistent. It was established (as far as I can judge from history, for I am unacquainted with *special pleading*,) for the protection of Christianity—not *in general*, but in the *particular* and *individual* form of Popery. The Reformation shifted the protection of the law, to

Christianity as professed by the Church of England. It was afterwards still more limited to a Christianity which should embrace the doctrine of the Trinity. Within the time of my residence in England, even that doctrine has been taken from under the protection of the law. Thus, "the law of England, (I use S. N.'s words,) the common law—that is, the common sense of the nation, the aggregate wisdom of successive generations, having decreed that Christianity should be the national religion, has thereby made it a misdemeanor to deny its truth."—(p. 38.) And yet, "under that law, (p. 35,) the Infidel may write against every article of every Christian Church, and against the validity of each and every argument adduced in support of Christianity, with impunity—nay, he may go farther, and publish *sober and serious reasons for scepticism as to revealed religion*, and if his book be answerable to its title, he may rest secure from prosecution."

The author of the Reply concludes most deliberately in the words—*Nolumus leges Angliæ mutari*. To such an act of pure volition I must humbly answer, in the same language—*De gustibus non est disputandum*.

APPENDIX.

NOTES.

PAGE 21.

It was necessary for that fanciful demonstration, to lay it down as an axiom, that no civil society can exist unless the members of it believe "the being of a God, his providence over human affairs, and the natural essential difference of moral good and evil."

The old question, whether a society of Atheists could exist, would never have occupied speculative divines and moralists, if those who were inclined to moot it, had stopped to define their meaning of the word *Atheist*.

If by *Atheist*, they mean a monster without a single human feeling, there is no need of discussion to decide that beings wanting every *social* principle could not constitute a *society*. But here it is curious to observe that this question about the

possibility of an Atheistical society, has generally been settled side by side with another, upon which the same class of writers unanimously conclude that the existence of an *Atheist* is impossible.

Atheism, as an error of speculation, is so various, that to speak of it as of a simple notion, must create endless confusion. But there is no need of a long dissertation about the varieties of opinions which may be called *Atheistical*. The question is—Could a society exist if all its members denied the existence of some invisible Being, called God? My answer is, that it is a great wonder that the greatest part of the human race has continued for ages in a social state, *under the belief of such gods as they conceive to exist*. Now if the Canaanites, whom the Israelites were commissioned to destroy, could live in society, believing in gods who demanded their children as victims to be consumed by fire—who were supposed to look upon the most atrocious and abominable actions with pleasure; and whose worship made men, in the eyes of Jehovah, worthy of being destroyed from the face of the earth; such people would have been much improved by having no gods. Greeks and Romans grew up into most refined societies, under the influence of a belief in gods, whose example invited them to every crime. Would they not have been improved by the denial of such gods? Can it be supposed that the *name* God, whether that god is Juggernaut, or the equally sanguinary god of the Mexicans, is the charm on which all human society depends? It would seem as if Bishop Warburton had never read St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans; for surely that apostle does not give a very favourable idea of the results of a *wrong* belief in some invisible power. St. Paul does not appear to have conceived such favourable expectations of *any* belief in God but the true

belief. The truth is, that so far was that great luminary of Christianity from conceiving that civil society depends on any belief in *some* deity, that he expressly declares all the Gentiles to have been *Atheists* in fact, though their societies had existed and prospered for ages. (See Eph. xii. 12.) The Greek word which in that passage is translated *without God*, is *Atheoi*, and it is accompanied with the additional declaration, that they *had no hope*; evidently no hope of another life. St. Paul, it is clear, did not agree with Bishop Warburton, since that apostle considered all men who had not the true Israelitish belief in God, as *Atheists*, who lived in society. Nor does, indeed, experience give the least support to that prelate's notions. The monstrous conceptions which the greatest part of mankind have of the Deity, and the vices and horrors which those conceptions produce, afford a clear proof of the great strength of the *natural* social principles in man; else the ties of society could not bear the disorganizing influence of such opinions, concerning the Invisible, as are spread over the earth. I must conclude this note with a fact, which, from its simplicity, and the *naïveté* with which it is told, would have tried the temper of Bishop Warburton, had he lived to hear it.

"After travelling about an hour (says Mr. Ellis, the Missionary,) through a country which appeared more thickly inhabited than that which we had passed in the morning, we came to Kapankee, (in Owyhee) a pleasant village belonging to Naihe. As we passed through it, we found tall rows of sugar-cane lining the path on either side, and beneath their shade we sat down to rest. A crowd of natives soon gathered around us; and after a little general conversation, we asked them who was their god? They said they had no god; formerly they had many, but now they had cast them all away. We asked them

if they had done well in abolishing them? They said, yes, for the tabu occasioned much labour and inconvenience, and drained off the best of their property. We asked them if it was a good thing to have no god, and to know of no being to whom they ought to render religious homage? They said, perhaps it was, for they had nothing to provide for the great sacrifices, and were under no fear of punishment for breaking tabu; that now one fire cooked their food, and men and women ate together, the same kind of provisions."—*Polynesian Researches*, vol. 4, p. 201.) The *Atheism* of these poor people had made them *more social* than they were before. It did more; it removed many a difficulty to the reception of Christianity. "It is greatly good! (many of them exclaimed, when they had heard of Christ and of salvation by him) We wish to become the people of Jesus Christ, and to be saved everlastingly by him."—(*Ibid.*)

PAGE 32.

Cicero and all the Roman Divines, &c.

The whole sentence from which the words in the text are quoted, is this:—"Jam ritus familiæ patrumque servare, id est (quoniam antiquitas proxime accedit ad Deos) a Diis quasi traditam religionem tueri.

PAGE 47.

I never knew an unbeliever who was dishonest in his unbelief.

The fear of being misunderstood upon important points is my

excuse for multiplying these notes. To stop every moment, in order to obviate every *possible* misunderstanding, is very distracting both to writer and reader. I think it much better to add a few notes for that purpose. With respect to the words placed at the head of this remark, I beg leave to repeat, that by *dishonest unbelief*, I understand *pretended* unbelief. If dishonesty is taken in another sense (which certainly does not apply to the present question)—if by *dishonest* unbelief, a voluntary *inattention* to the Christian evidence is meant, I will not deny that there are men “who love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.” But I must add, that I have not known many such. It is a curious fact, that some of the most vicious men I met with, in the early part of my life, were *believers*. On the contrary, one of the most excellent men I ever knew—a man whose life has been always morally pure, whose intellect is of the very first order, who spent his youth in the practice of Christian benevolence, under a strong sense of Christian duty—such a man became an unbeliever in his maturer age, without the least visible change in his moral conduct. These are *facts* known to me. General assertions upon such a subject must be incorrect, whichever side they favour; and pious believers should be aware, that instead of helping the cause of Christianity, by harsh judgments against such as doubt, or deny its divine origin, they do it great injury. The greatest part of the unbelief which exists, has no slight excuse in the corruptions which disfigure the Gospel; in the violence which its advocates and professors employ to defend it; in the party purposes for which the name of religion is used; in the great want of charity which shows itself in the discussion of religious questions, and the management of church interests. In proportion as the true mark of Christ’s disciples shall appear among those who call

themselves by his name—in proportion as Christians shall learn “to love one another,”—in that proportion the extent and inveteracy of unbelief will diminish.

PAGE 67.

I wish that unmeaning declamation about the temporal punishment due to the man who endeavours to “turn others from the faith, because it is turning them from allegiance to their Heavenly King,” would cease to expose religion to hatred and ridicule.

In the year 1524, Luther wrote to his sovereign, the Elector Frederick, who was inclined to employ force against the preachers of enthusiastic and unevangelical doctrines, to this effect:—

“Your Grace ought not to interfere with the office of the Word. Let them preach away vigorously and confidently, whatever they please, and against whomsoever they please; for surely ‘there must be also heresies,’ (1 Cor. xi. 19,) and the Word of God must take the field and fight. If their spirit is right, it will not shrink before us, but rather be established. If ours is right, it will not quail either before them or any man. Let the minds struggle against each other and fight it out.

“Are some deceived? Well, then, that is what must happen in war. Where there is strife and slaughter, there must also be slain and wounded. But he that fights honorably, will receive the crown.”—*Luther's Briefe, von de Wette, Bd. II. S. 547. ap. Neander Gelegenheitsschriften, p. 17 and 113.*

In justice to the subject, and as a small testimony of the admiration and love to Dr. Neander himself, which his writings have

produced in me, I must add a translation of the words by which that truly amiable Christian softens the rough boldness of the expressions quoted from Luther. My still imperfect acquaintance with German, makes me fear that the translation will destroy a great part of the original beauty of the passage ; but I feel certain that I shall preserve its general meaning.

“ Christian love (Neander immediately subjoins to that passage) must here deplore the fall of so many weak brethren, in the battle between error and truth. But there are evils in this our earthly existence, which, while we must lament them, we are nevertheless forced to consider as necessarily involved in the course of earthly things, in consequence of the entrance of sin into the world ; evils, in regard to which we must acknowledge, that their cure cannot be sudden ; and that an impatient, rash, and too grappling curative method, which would stop the developement of the peccant humours, and give no time to the purifying process of nature’s life, would only increase their malignity. The struggle between error and truth is analogous to the struggle of good and evil throughout the whole course of this earthly life. The entire developement of man’s nature in this earthly existence, is grounded in struggle. He that would remove that struggle must, at once, change our nature—he must unsettle the whole method of life’s developement which has been ordained by God. Every man must go through the struggle. Whatever is *genuine* must appear, and prove itself such in that struggle. No art can teach us how to ward it off. All that contrivance could do would be only to cramp nature, instead of letting it display a brisk and lively action. In this struggle, which no man can escape, there is but one way of safety, and that consists in the heavenly armour which the word of God affords to sincere obedience. But this armour is such that every

man must take it up himself—it cannot be given by another—the putting it on must be the act of each individual. Christ does not pray to his Heavenly Father that the believers be kept out of the struggle with the world, but that by the internal assistance of his Spirit, they may, in the midst of the struggle, be preserved from evil." (John xvii. 15.)—*Ubi supra*.

PAGE 71.

The word compelle which the Vulgate uses, &c.

There is probably no language in which the words which may express violent compulsion, are not equally used to signify the act of *obliging by persuasion and kindness*. That *αναγκάζω* is very frequently employed by the best writers to express the *urgency of kindness*, is too well known to be doubted by any one tolerably acquainted with Greek. But the absurdity of supposing that any one in his senses should order *violence* to be employed in collecting guests for a supper, is so glaring, that no scholarship is required to perceive it. When men talk of *compulsion, necessity, obligation, &c.* they always adapt the signification of those words to the nature of the subject. It would be childish to understand the same kind of necessity in the expressions, "he was obliged to give his money to the robbers:"—"he was obliged to accept a situation in India:"—"he could not help accepting an invitation to a party." The idea of necessity is always modified by the subject matter.

See the word NECESSARY, in Appendix to Archbishop Whately's Logic.

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Not any of a very long list of vices condemned by Christianity, is made the subject of any criminal law—and it is wisely done.

“To you, my Reverend Brethren, (says Bishop Copleston) I need hardly observe how utterly inefficient LAWS are in improving the heart of man ; that the strictest legal discipline will only engender caution in him who seeks to do amiss ; that it is for the sake of the Church at large—to avoid scandal—to remove every stumbling-block in the way of the Gospel, that we seek to exercise a controul beyond what the law now warrants. Even then, the correction would be of a negative kind only. The willing mind, the pure and upright, and disinterested purpose, the love of Christ, and the constant desire to increase his kingdom, no laws, no polity can impart. It can only be derived from above, and from the gracious supply of that Holy Spirit which is promised to all who sincerely and earnestly desire his assistance, and who rejoice in the promise distinctly made, that He will abide with us for ever.”—*Bishop of Llandaff’s Charge, September, 1833. p. 26.* In quoting a passage every way so worthy of a prelate whose friendship I value as a distinguished honor, and whose long experienced kindness is to me a source of heartfelt satisfaction, I cannot help regretting that the views concerning the *parental* duties of governments, expressed in the same Charge, seem to be completely at variance with what I have endeavoured to establish in the preceding letter. As I cannot but differ on that point from my respected friend, I have taken this oppor-

tunity of showing that I differ from him reluctantly, and with all the deference due to his talents and learning. I beg leave also to add, that what I have said on the principle of paternal governments, does not apply directly to his Lordship's Charge. I had it not in view when I was writing, and thought of nothing but the abstract principle itself.

THE END.

